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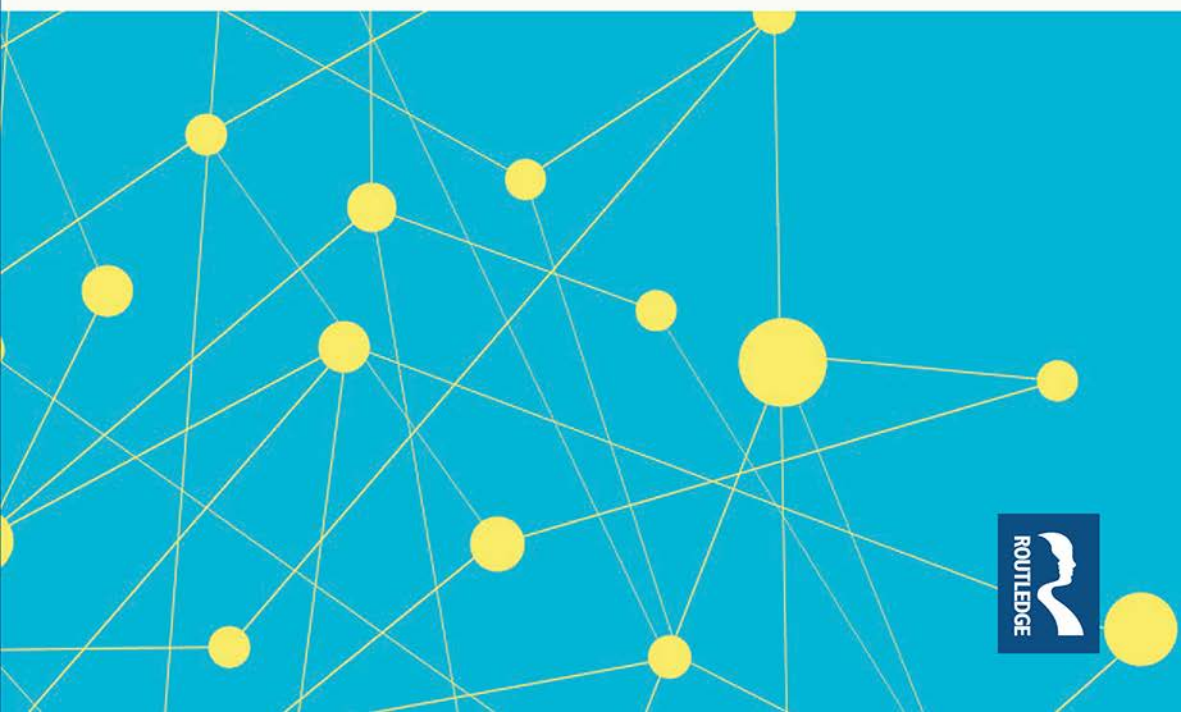
PUTIN'S FASCISTS

RUSSKII OBRAZ AND THE POLITICS OF MANAGED NATIONALISM IN RUSSIA

Robert Horvath



Putin's Fascists

This book examines the relationship between the Putin regime and Russkii Obraz, a neo-Nazi organization that became a major force on Russia's radical nationalist scene in 2008–10. It shows how Russkii Obraz's rise was boosted by the regime's policy of 'managed nationalism,' which mobilised radical nationalist proxies against opponents of authoritarianism. In return for undermining moderate nationalists and pro-democracy activists, Russkii Obraz received official support and access to public space. What made this collaboration politically hazardous for the Kremlin was Russkii Obraz's neo-Nazi ideology and its connections to BORN, a terrorist group responsible for a series of high-profile killings. When security forces captured the ringleader of BORN, they precipitated the destruction of Russkii Obraz and a crisis for managed nationalism. Using court records and extensive media and internet sources, this book sheds new light on the complex interaction between the Kremlin, the far-right, and neo-Nazi skinheads during Russia's descent into authoritarianism.

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Abbreviations

AKM	Avangard krasnoi molodezhi (Avant-garde of Red Youth)
B&H	Blood & Honour/Combat18
BORN	Boevaya Organizatsiya Russkikh Natsionalistov (Combat Organisation of Russian Nationalists)
CIS-EMO	Commonwealth of Independent States - Election Monitoring Organisation
FNS	Front Natsional'nogo Spaseniya (National Salvation Front)
DNR	Donetskaya Narodnaya Respublika (Donetsk People's Republic)
DON	Dobrovol'cheskoe dvizhenie "Obshcherossiiskogo Narodnogo Fronta" (Volunteer Movement of the All-Russian Popular Front)
DPNI	Dvizhenie Protiv Nelegal'noi Immigratsii (Movement against Illegal Immigration)
ESM	Evraziiskii Soyuz Molodezhi (Eurasian Youth Union)
FSB	Federal'naya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti (Federal Security Servicec)
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
IRA	Irish Republican Army
KRO	Kongress Russkikh Obshchin (Congress of Russian Communities)
KPRF	Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Rossiiskoi Federatsii (Communist Party of Russian Federation)
LDPR	Liberal'no-Demokraticheskaya Partiya Rossii (Liberal Democratic Party of Russia)
LNR	Luganskaya Narodnaya Respublika (Lugansk People's Republic)
MED	Mezhdunarodnoe Evraziiskoe Dvizhenie (International Eurasianist Movement)
MGER	Molodaya Gvardiya Edinoi Rossii (Young Guard of United Russia)
MTS	Moscow Trojan Skinheads
MVD	Ministerstvo Vnutrennikh Del (Ministry of Internal Affairs)
NAK	Natsional'nyi antiterroristicheskii komitet (National anti-terrorism committee)
NBP	Natsional'no-Bolshevistskaya Partiya (National-Bolshevik Party)
NDPR	Natsional'no-Derzhavnaya Partiya Rossii (National Great Power Party of Russia)

NOD	Natsional'no-Osvoboditel'noe Dvizhenie (National Liberation Movement)
NS	Narodnyi Soyuz (Popular Union)
NSO	Natsional-Sotsialisticheskoe Obshchestvo (National Socialist Society)
NSO-Sever	(National Socialist Society - North)
NS-WP	National Socialism-White Power
OAS	Organisation Armée Secrète (Secret Armed Organisation)
OB-88	Ob"edinennyi Brigad - 88 (United Brigade-88)
OMON	Otryad Mobil'nyi Osobogo Naznacheniya (Special Purpose Mobile Unit) riot police
ONF	Obshcherossiiskii Narodnyi Front (All-Russian Popular Front)
PKA	Pravo-Konservativnyi Al'yans (Right-Conservative Alliance)
RAU	Rossiisko-Amerikanskii Universitet (Russian-American University)
RNE	Russkoe Natsional'noe Edinstvo (Russian National Unity)
RNS	Russkii Natsional'nyi Sobor (Russian National Council)
RO	Russkii Obraz (Russian Image)
ROD	Russkoe Obshchestvennoe Dvizhenie (Russian Public Movement)
RONS	Russkii obshchenatsional'nyi soyuz (Russian All-National Union)
RuMol	Rossiya Molodaya (Young Russia)
Tsentr 'E'	Tsentr po protivodeistviyu ekstremizmu (Centre for counteracting extremism)
SVR	Sluzhba Vneshnei Razvedki (External Intelligence Service)
ZOG	Zionist Occupation Government

Introduction

This is a book about the relationship between the Russian state and nationalist extremists. It examines the development of the Putin regime's policy of 'managed nationalism,' a set of measures that were designed to manipulate the nationalist sector of the political arena. In theory, this policy might have contributed to political stability and interethnic harmony by promoting moderate figures and weakening extremists. In practice, however, some of the most notable beneficiaries of 'managed nationalism' came from the far-right outer limits of the political spectrum. One of the most notorious was Russkii Obraz ('Russian Image'), a neo-Nazi organisation whose rise and fall comprises the central narrative of this book. During 2007–9, Kremlin support enabled Russkii Obraz to become a major force in nationalist politics. At the same time, key figures in Russkii Obraz were closely connected to Nikita Tikhonov, the leader of a paramilitary death squad that was waging a campaign of terror that claimed the lives of prominent public figures. When state security forces arrested Tikhonov in November 2009, they did more than expose the dark side of Russkii Obraz. They also created an embarrassing scandal for its patrons in the corridors of power. The result was a major curtailment of 'managed nationalism.'

The Putin regime's collaboration with neo-Nazi elements like Russkii Obraz was paradoxical on at least two levels. First, the vast wartime devastation inflicted upon Russian society by Nazi Germany should have ruled out any dealings with its ideological heirs. Indeed, the Kremlin repeatedly invoked that devastation when it employed anti-fascist rhetoric as a weapon against its political adversaries. State functionaries and regime-aligned structures routinely vilified the liberal and leftist opposition as fascist sympathisers. This line of attack was central to the propaganda of Nashi, the flagship of the flotilla of pro-Kremlin youth organisations. One of Nashi's programmatic documents was *Extraordinary Fascism*, a brochure which divided the opposition between fascists like Eduard Limonov and his liberal collaborators, who were stigmatised as 'fascist sympathisers.'[1] The ruling party, United Russia, joined the bandwagon in 2006, when it promoted an 'Anti-fascist Pact.' This document was intended to set the limits of the permissible by obliging systemic political parties to make a formal commitment to oppose 'nationalism, xenophobia, and religious discord.'[2]

On the international stage, anti-fascism became a prominent theme of Russian foreign policy. The second half of the 2000s witnessed a series of clashes with the

Baltic states and Ukraine over the legacy of the Second World War. The most acrimonious revolved around the Estonian government's removal of the bronze statue of a Red Army soldier from central Tallinn in April 2007, which triggered the world's first cyberwar.[3] Later that year, the Kremlin's anti-fascist crusade even reached the UN General Assembly, which passed a Russian-sponsored resolution expressing concern 'about the glorification of the Nazi movement and former members of the Waffen SS organisation' and 'the increase in the number of racist incidents in several countries, and the rise of skinhead groups.'[4] The apotheosis of this propaganda was the Russian response to the overthrow of Ukraine's President Viktor Yanukovych in February 2014. The first major demonstration by Kremlin-backed groups in support of the annexation of Crimea was held under banners 'In support of Crimea and against fascism.'[5] The following day, addressing a joint session of the Russian State Duma, President Putin denounced the instigators of the Ukrainian revolution as 'nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes, and anti-Semites.'[6]

The Kremlin's readiness to cultivate neo-Nazis is also problematic because they posed a serious threat to public order. Since the first wave of racist attacks on Moscow streets in the spring of 1998, gangs of young men influenced by neo-Nazi ideas had left trails of racist carnage across the country. It is difficult to exaggerate the menace posed by these hate crimes to the cohesion of Russia's fragile, multi-ethnic society, which was already strained by terrorist attacks in Russian cities, a simmering jihadi insurgency in the Northern Caucasus, and the rise of an anti-immigration movement. The bloodshed also caused considerable diplomatic embarrassment. The victims included both staff at foreign embassies and guest workers from friendly CIS-member-states in Central Asia.

No less ominous for the Kremlin was the neo-Nazi underground's use of revolutionary violence against the state itself. During Putin's second term, neo-Nazi discussion forums debated the merits of terrorist acts against 'the system,' against the regime and the bureaucratic apparatus that facilitated non-white immigration. Some militants argued that targeted assassinations of prominent public figures would have greater political impact than the random killing of marginal and replaceable migrant workers. The dissemination of this idea coincided with an escalating conflict between neo-Nazi paramilitary groups and the security apparatus. In its annual report for 2009, SOVA Center warned that far-right groups were increasingly resorting to anti-state terrorism, which was aimed at destabilising government institutions, sowing popular distrust of them, and fomenting a 'national revolution.'[7] This terrorism involved a spate of attacks on police, state officials, and the judiciary. Shaken into action after a decade of benign neglect, the authorities retaliated with a crackdown on skinhead gangs and the neo-Nazi underground. Scores of fighters were imprisoned for racially-motivated violence. By March 2009, Russia's National Anti-Terrorist Committee, a coordinating body of security structures, stated for the first time that neo-Nazi gangs represented a threat that was second only to Islamist terrorism.[8]

Despite these dangers, the Kremlin cultivated the support of neo-Nazis in a variety of ways. In 2005–7, some neo-Nazi militants found employment in Kremlin-backed propaganda initiatives. Others worked behind the scenes for Mestnye (Locals), a loyalist youth organisation, and for the 'Russian Project,' an

effort by the ruling party, Edinaya Rossiya (United Russia), to co-opt nationalists during the lead up to the Duma elections. By 2008–9, the neo-Nazis of Russkii Obraz were openly collaborating in public events with Rossiya Molodaya, one of the most aggressive Kremlin-backed youth organisations. They debated government policy with state officials, including high-ranking police functionaries, who treated them respectfully in public forums. They gathered intelligence about the left-liberal opposition for both the Presidential Administration and the security forces. While opposition protests were routinely crushed by riot police, some neo-Nazis were allowed to hold mass events in sensitive public spaces. The apotheosis of this collaboration was a notorious, officially-authorised concert by neo-Nazi rock bands in Bolotnaya Square, within earshot of the Kremlin, on 4 November 2009, the 'Day of National Unity.' An instant scandal, the concert provoked shock in liberal circles and disbelief even among far-right militants.

Despite the centrality of nationalism to Russian political life, the Putin regime's 'managed nationalism' has attracted surprisingly little scholarly attention. Ironically, the growing influence of nationalism on the Russia state during the 2000s coincided with waning academic interest in the subject. The tumult of Yel'tsin's Russia in the 1990s inspired a vigorous scholarly debate about the dangers of Russian fascism and the notion of 'Weimar Russia.'[9] Stephen Hanson and Jeffrey Kopstein argued that parallels with the 1930s should not be exaggerated. Unlike interwar Germany, with its long-established parties and abundance of associational life, post-Soviet Russia lacked a stable party system and robust organisations capable of capturing the state.[10] This reassuring thesis was challenged by Stephen Shenfield, who pointed to the growing influence of the neo-Nazi RNE (Russian National Unity) at a regional level, where it frequently cooperated with local law enforcement agencies and encroached on the state's role in 'military-patriotic education.'[11] The 'Weimar Russia' debate became a stimulus for detailed studies of the engagement between state institutions and the far-right.[12]

By contrast, under Putin, the literature on Russian nationalism has downplayed the regime's interaction with the far-right. The spectre of Weimar Russia was dispelled by the ascendancy of a strong leader, who re-centralised power and cracked down on extremism. According to Steffan Kailitz and Andreas Umland, Putin's authoritarianism became a bulwark protecting Russia from the kind of fascist takeover that brought Hitler to power.[13] Under the impact of this new stability, scholarship on Russian nationalism tended to focus either on state institutions or upon the far-right scene.[14] One group of scholars investigated the ways that the Putin regime was reinventing the nation: its nation-building projects, its notions of citizenship, and its public rhetoric about nationality. These scholars generally devoted little attention to the state's interaction with radical nationalists.[15] Conversely, scholarship on the multifarious forms of radical nationalism under Putin shed little light on how the state has shaped and been shaped by these phenomena. Studies of radical nationalist ideologues have attempted either to classify their ideas, to illuminate their intellectual lineage, or to explore their strategies of legitimation.[16] Important ethnographic fieldwork has illuminated the social world and the cultural codes of Russian skinheads, but their political role has been virtually ignored.[17]

By magnifying the separation of the state and radical nationalists, these approaches have contributed to a perception of Russian nationalism under Putin as a 'normal' phenomenon. The leading proponent of this approach is Marlène Laruelle, one of the most insightful and knowledgeable experts on Russian nationalism. In an important monograph, published in 2010, Laruelle argued that Russian nationalism was a stabilising force, whose rise 'marks a return to social, political, cultural, and emotional normalcy.'[18] In the aftermath of the catastrophic collapse of the Soviet Union, nationalism ameliorated the disruptive effects of socio-economic crisis and imperial disintegration. It functioned 'to integrate citizens and legitimate the power of the elite, all the while ensuring social cohesion in a period of significant disruption.'[19]

The invasion of Crimea and the use of radical nationalists to foment a proxy war in southeast Ukraine cast doubt on this benign view of Russian nationalism. For many scholars, however, Putin's adoption of Russian nationalist ideas during his third presidential term marked an abandonment of his earlier caution. In a contribution to a major volume on post-Crimea Russian nationalism, Henry Hale contended that before 2014 'nationalism was mobilised more actively by Kremlin opponents than by Putin himself.' Like Laruelle, however, Hale viewed nationalism as a force for stability. The annexation of Crimea was 'a bold stroke that for the first time made nationalism a centrepiece of not only of Putin's own authority, but of the political system's stability more generally.'[20]

This positive interpretation was reinforced by a paucity of detailed analysis of the interaction between the Russian state and radical nationalists. Most major nationalist leaders and organisations of the Putin era have escaped in-depth scholarly scrutiny. The Rodina party, which was a real political force in the State Duma during 2004–6 and an important bridge between the radical nationalist milieu and state institutions, has received only superficial study.[21] Organisations such as the Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI) and the National Great Power Party of Russia (NDPR) have received little more than cursory attention.[22] The subject of this book, Russkii Obraz has also eluded the attention of scholars. In 2009, SOVA Center's major handbook on Russian ultra-nationalist organisations referred to it only in the entry on another organisation.[23] Nor was Russkii Obraz mentioned in Marlène Laruelle's major study of contemporary Russian nationalism.[24]

The problem is compounded by the neglect of radical nationalists in mainstream studies of the politics of the Putin regime. One of the seminal texts in the field, Richard Sakwa's *Putin. Russia's Choice*, devoted a chapter to 'reforging the nation,' which accentuated the gulf between the Kremlin and radical nationalists. Sakwa painted a rosy picture of Putin the Westerniser, a 'civil nation builder,' who was 'liberal in his patriotism,' who rejected the irredentist fantasies of the red-brown bloc of the 1990s, and who stood resolutely against xenophobia and ethnic violence.[25] This judgement was reinforced by the lack of information about the Kremlin's manipulation of nationalism. Sakwa referred to the far-right's first major breakthrough into public space, the 'Right March' of 2005, when 'various hard-line nationalists' paraded through central Moscow 'demanding the expulsion of foreign nations and the like.'[26] What was omitted from this brief account was the

fact that this march became possible because it was instigated by a Kremlin proxy, Aleksandr Dugin's Eurasian Youth Union, which had consciously attempted to mobilise far-right militants against the threat of coloured revolution.

Contrary to the proponents of 'Putin the Westerniser' and 'normal nationalism,' this book argues that the evolution of Russian nationalism under the Putin regime is far from a 'normal' or reassuring phenomenon. It seeks to demonstrate that the regime's policies served to weaken moderate nationalists and to strengthen violent extremists. This outcome was a natural result of the regime's increasing authoritarianism and its efforts to mobilise supporters against the threat of a democratic, 'coloured' revolution. It was precisely extreme nationalists, not moderates, who were more inclined to participate in this counter-revolutionary project. On an ideological level, extremists rejected the idea of liberal democracy and regarded its advocates as mortal enemies. On the level of strategy, extremists regarded the penetration of state institutions, not free elections, as a path to power. In social terms, extremists were closer to violent elements in the football gang and skinhead milieu, which were mobilised as proxies by Kremlin-backed youth organisations. By contrast, moderate nationalists were more liable to be drawn into the 'coloured,' anti-Kremlin opposition.

At the heart of 'managed nationalism' was the question: who is manipulating whom? This book shows that both sides in this strange courtship apparently believed that they would have the last word. The Kremlin's political technologists clearly regarded their ultra-nationalist partners as marionettes, harmless performers in a political theatre. Devoid of political agency, obedient to their 'curators,' these marionettes had a role to play in combatting more serious threats to the regime, such as the liberal and leftist organisers of the 'Dissenters' Marches' and the emerging national-democratic movement. On the other side of this poker game, the Kremlin's far-right collaborators operated according to a similar set of calculations. For some of them, the regime was nothing less than 'the horde,' a foreign imposition comparable to the Mongol yoke of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Collaboration with 'the horde' served three functions. First, it gave ultra-nationalists access to resources and public space, which was essential if they were to become a major political force. Second, it offered them an opportunity to enlist the power of state in their struggle against their mortal enemies; liberals and the Antifa movement. And third, it opened a door into state institutions, which some radical nationalists regarded as a pathway to power.

What made this strange dialogue possible was *sistema*, a system of governance practices based on informal ties that functioned in parallel to the formal institutions and procedures of state administration.[27] According to Gleb Pavlovskii, a long-serving Kremlin adviser, *sistema* is fundamental to the operation of the Putin regime and 'will outlast Putin himself.'[28] Two aspects of *sistema* helped to shroud the operation of managed nationalism. The first was that major actions were made not by explicit directives but by a 'go-ahead' signal (*otmashka*), which was 'not so much as order as a licence to act in a desired direction.' The informal nature of *otmashka* makes it almost impossible to pinpoint the origin of a policy or a decision.[29] The second important aspect of *sistema* is that implementation

was left to 'curators,' whom Pavlovskii defines as 'semi-official figures through whom state governance flows':

> A curator is a political bureaucrat, a project manager authorised by the Kremlin to operate through personal agents. The curator is not publicly responsible for his agents' actions, and the agents follow his instructions only as long as they benefit from doing so. If a curator meets resistance, he is free to punish the recalcitrant party, either through bureaucratic means or by replacing him with another agent.[30]

Despite their crucial role in the implementation of policy, curators often operated outside state institutions. Some of those identified as 'Kremlin curators' of Russkii Obraz never held an official position in the Presidential Administration. This status offered plausible deniability to the supervisors of 'managed nationalism,' who could dismiss the actions of curators as the recklessness of marginal actors. Yet it was precisely the prerogatives granted to curators that enabled them to develop such an intimate relationship with militants of the far-right.

Sistema poses major challenges for the researcher of 'managed nationalism.' Informal directives and their implementation by curators rarely leave traces in the public record. The difficulties are compounded by the fact that the Kremlin's nationalist collaborators were conspiratorial, constantly mutating, and prone to ideological obfuscation. Russkii Obraz's public statements were marked by misdirection and disinformation. Much of its internal operation has left no public traces. For many years, little was known about its structure, its decision-making processes, its membership, or its financial sources. Even the identity of its real leader was a matter of debate. Part of Russkii Obraz's activism before 2008 was shrouded by the fact that its leading activists were working behind the scenes for an array of nationalist politicians and nationalist organisations like *Narodnyi Soyuz* (Popular Union) and *Dvizhenie protiv nelegalnoi immigratsii* ('Movement against Illegal Immigration,' DPNI).

The effects of this secrecy have been compounded by the constant disappearance of digital sources. Some vanished because they were platforms for organisations or projects that became defunct. A plethora of neo-Nazi sites, which contained a wealth of contextual information about Russkii Obraz, were shut down by the Russian authorities using anti-extremism legislation. Others were deleted by activists in a stampede to remove compromising posts during the crackdown on Russkii Obraz in 2010–11.[31] Material lost in this digital purge includes Russkii's Obraz's LiveJournal community blog, which was an important forum for interaction between the movement's leaders and its sympathisers. Although some sources remain accessible on the internet archive, many were consigned to oblivion by the use of the 'robots exclusion standard' to deter web crawlers.

Another obstacle is the unreliability of many sources that survive. 'Managed nationalism' provoked a flood of misinformation. On the one hand, some nationalist leaders were inclined to exaggerate the closeness of their relations to the Kremlin. The impression of proximity to power was a potent deterrent to police

investigators. It was also a source of authority in the neo-Nazi milieu, because an activist with high-level connections could help comrades who had fallen foul of the law. On the other hand, nationalist politicians and bloggers frequently used accusations of collaboration with the Kremlin or the security forces to discredit rivals. To allege that a nationalist organisation was a 'Kremlin project' was to deny its autonomy and authenticity and to assert that it was an exercise in deception. Some of these accusations proved well-founded. Many were at least half truths. Others were baseless slander.

Despite these problems, the history of Russkii Obraz offers an important window into 'managed nationalism.' As a public organisation led by media professionals, it left extensive digital traces that make it possible to reconstruct its racist ideology, its cult of the Third Reich, its celebration of political violence, and its rapid emergence as a major force in nationalist politics. As a result of the trials of Il'ya Goryachev and the members of BORN, a substantial volume of the organisation's private communications have been collated in court volumes and widely discussed in the media. This trove includes email correspondence with leading functionaries of pro-Kremlin youth organisations and figures close to the Presidential Administration. Although many far-right organisations were drawn into 'managed nationalism,' only Russkii Obraz was subjected to this kind of judicial exposure and public scrutiny.

This book uses the history of Russkii Obraz to illuminate the evolving relationship between the Putin regime and Russian radical nationalists. Chapter 1 provides a historical framework by examining the antecedents of 'managed nationalism' between the late 1980s and the early 2000s. It shows how Boris Yel'tsin's avowedly 'democratic' and pro-Western administration developed a set of measures to contain the threat posed by the 'irreconcilable' opposition, the 'red-brown' coalition that brought the country to the brink of civil war in the autumn of 1993. By promoting civic nationalism and a 'national idea,' Yel'tsin tried to undermine public support for ethnonationalism. At the same time, his administration attempted to manipulate nationalist politicians, using some as 'scarecrows' to discredit their cause, and promoting others as allies in the struggle with the Communist Party. This project was inherited by Vladimir Putin, who radically transformed it. If the Yel'tsin administration had 'managed' nationalism to defend a faltering liberal-democratic project, Putin harnessed Russian nationalists to support his assault on the independent media and the centralisation of power. In his first term, the Kremlin reached out to hard-line nationalist intellectuals and sponsored an array of nationalist political projects. Through the intermediary of the first major loyalist youth organisation, Idushchie Vmeste, it also experimented with the use of neo-Nazi skinheads as violent proxies.

Chapter 2 illuminates the genesis of Russkii Obraz as a groupuscule in the far-right subculture of the early 2000s. On the one hand, it shows how three centres of that subculture – the neo-Nazi rock band Kolovrat, the skinhead gang OB-88, and the National Bolshevik Party (NBP) – shaped the group's inner circle. On the other, it traces Russkii Obraz's coalescence around the figures of Il'ya Goryachev and Nikita Tikhonov, two history students who developed contacts with the Serbian radical nationalist group Obraz, an organisation that provided them with a

name, a format, and a developmental model. The first stage in this model was the launching of a journal, *Russkii Obraz*, which established the group's reputation in the nationalist milieu. At a superficial glance, *Russkii Obraz* seemed to exemplify intelligent, pragmatic patriotism. A closer reading reveals that it was a platform for a neo-fascist ideological project. In particular, it exhibited three traits that accorded with Roger Griffin's seminal conceptualisation of fascist ideology as 'palingenetic ultra-nationalism,' which promised a kind of national rebirth through a purifying revolution.[32] First, *Russkii Obraz* was obsessed with symptoms of national degeneration and advocated a regenerating counter-revolution. Second, it treated race as a central component of national identity and advocated an apartheid-style political order. And third, it glorified a diverse range of perpetrators of far-right revolutionary violence.

Chapter 3 shows how members of Russkii Obraz were drawn into Putin's 'preventive counter-revolution,' a set of measures designed to immunise Russia against the contagion of 'coloured revolution' that was spreading across the post-Soviet space. These measures included the creation of a panoply of pro-Kremlin youth organisations and media outlets that were intended to rally youth behind the regime and to serve as a counterforce to the democratic opposition. These loyalist structures became both a source of employment for radical nationalists and a bridge between state institutions and the far-right scene. Militants of Russkii Obraz worked in an array of Kremlin-sponsored projects, which ranged from the youth newspaper *RE:aktsiya*, an anti-orangist platform, to the ruling party's Russia Project, an attempt to rally nationalist support during the 2007–8 election cycle. The supervisors of these projects had no objections to the involvement of their employees in far-right activism. While Goryachev and his friends worked for the regime, they were flaunting their radicalism in the neo-Nazi music scene, where Russkii Obraz's band *Khuk Sprava* celebrated racial violence, vilified 'black southerners' as rapists, and ridiculed tolerance as 'the choice of losers.' More problematic was the fact that they were using their new Kremlin-backed platforms to promote far-right ideas and to pursue their own political vendettas.

Chapter 4 shows how Russkii Obraz's emergence as a public organisation was made possible by the Kremlin's campaign to crush an emerging coalition between liberals and nationalists. What made this coalition dangerous was the involvement of Aleksandr Belov, a leader of the Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI), who had become a source of growing concern to the authorities because of his capacity to mobilise aggressive crowds and his decision to collaborate with liberal nationalists like Aleksei Naval'nyi. To contain this threat, the Kremlin launched a three-pronged assault on DPNI. First, loyalist youth organisations encroached on DPNI's support base by conducting their own openly xenophobic campaigns against illegal immigrants. Second, a group of militants in DPNI's Moscow branch, who were close to Russkii Obraz, fomented a split within the movement. Third, the authorities conceded political space to Russkii Obraz, which was allowed to become a kind of loyalist 'clone' of DPNI, mirroring its xenophobia but rejecting its anti-Kremlin politics. The Kremlin's sympathies were on display at the annual 'Russian March' in 2008, when DPNI militants

were violently dispersed by riot police on the Arbat while Russkii Obraz held an authorised march along the Shevchenko embankment. Paradoxically, these rewards did nothing to moderate Russkii Obraz's public extremism. In fact, during the period of its closest collaboration with the Kremlin, Russkii Obraz promulgated an overtly neo-Nazi political programme and became an advocate for the neo-Nazi underground.

Chapter 5 uses the history of Russkii Obraz to explore the relationship between the Kremlin's nationalist proxies and the surge of racist violence during 2006–10, when a network of neo-Nazi 'autonomous groups' terrorised non-Slavic immigrants on the streets of Russian cities. Russkii Obraz encouraged this terror by glorifying its perpetrators, by justifying their deeds, and by theorising their actions as a prelude to a 'national revolution.' This propaganda was much more than empty posturing. Behind the scenes, the leader of Russkii Obraz, Il'ya Goryachev, was secretly collaborating with Nikita Tikhonov, who had created the terrorist group that would become known as BORN. During 2008–10, Tikhonov's group waged a campaign of terror that combined racially-motivated murders and the assassination of prominent public figures. The most shocking was the killing in central Moscow of the human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and the journalist Anastasia Baburova. The chapter demonstrates that Goryachev influenced both Tikhonov's media strategy and his choice of targets. It also shows how Goryachev used BORN as a political tool. In his dealings with pro-Kremlin youth organisations, Goryachev offered Tikhonov's services as a kind of private enforcer. In his discussions with Tikhonov, Goryachev envisaged BORN's acts of terror as a source of pressure that would compel the authorities to legalise Russkii Obraz and enable it to compete in elections for public office.

Chapter 6 shows how the arrest and prosecution of Nikita Tikhonov led to the destruction of Russkii Obraz as a political force and to a crisis of 'managed nationalism.' If Russkii Obraz's ascendancy was a product of its ability to cultivate the Kremlin and the neo-Nazi far-right, it now found itself rejected by both. For its links to terrorism, Russkii Obraz was disowned by its official curators; for the readiness of its leaders to testify against Tikhonov, it was ostracised in far-right circles. The breakdown of Russkii Obraz became part of a larger crisis of 'managed nationalism,' which was fanned by Antifa militants. In response to new killings by BORN, Antifa militants staged protests that drew attention to the pro-Kremlin youth organisations that had collaborated closely with Russkii Obraz in 2008–9. Confirmation of this collaboration came from Goryachev himself, who tried to deter his interrogators by boasting about his links to Kremlin curators like Leonid Simunin. The result was an intense and protracted debate, both in the liberal media and the blogosphere, about the folly of the Kremlin's flirtation with neo-Nazis.

Chapter 7 examines how the Bolotnaya protests of 2011–12 and the Ukrainian revolution of 2013–14 became a catalyst for a renovation of 'managed nationalism.' To contain these challenges, the Kremlin launched a 'second preventive counter-revolution,' a set of repressive and mobilisational measures that transformed the relationship between the state and the nationalist milieu.[33] While the authorities unleashed a crackdown on anti-Putin nationalists, they offered new opportunities

to compliant radical nationalists. In terms of personnel, the most important was Dmitrii Rogozin, a veteran nationalist politician who was appointed deputy prime minister in December 2011. Instead of shady 'curators' in pro-Kremlin youth organisations, a high-ranking member of the government was now the principal interlocutor between the state and Russian nationalists. On an institutional level, pro-Kremlin Russian nationalists became prominent recipients of public grants openly dispensed by the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation.

Even as they were buffeted by the ongoing investigation of the BORN case, veterans of Russkii Obraz benefitted from this reordering. On the one hand, they used their connections to Rogozin to rebuild their relationship with the regime. On the other, they used an influx of funding to create an array of new, 'right-conservative' discussion forums that mirrored the format of some of the most important platforms of the protest movement. These forums enabled veterans of Russkii Obraz to play a conspicuous role in the Putin regime's 'conservative turn,' in the vilification of the punk band Pussy Riot, and in the advocacy of 'traditional values.' It also put them in a strong position to benefit from the expansion of official support for loyalist nationalism that followed the invasion of Crimea. By the summer of 2014, they were the organisers of a major campaign, uniting a wide spectrum of pro-Putin nationalists, to create public pressure for the expansion of the insurgency in southeast Ukraine to 'Novorossiya,' a large sustainable ethnic Russian state. This resurgence was stymied by the winding back of the Novorossiya project and by the BORN trials of 2014–15, but a pleiade of Russkii Obraz veterans retained their prominent place in public life.

Notes

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1 The genesis of managed nationalism

> It seems to me that Putin is engaged in a complex manipulation of all the strategic resources in the country, and he regards us as an object of manipulation. Of course, this linkage would be no less useful to us than to Putin.
>
> – Aleksandr Prokhanov, editor of the 'red-brown' newspaper *Zavtra*, October 2000[1]

Vladimir Putin did not invent 'managed nationalism' in Russia. Since the terminal crisis of the Soviet Union, high ranking officials in the Kremlin, regional governments, and the security apparatus had manipulated, courted, and cajoled Russian nationalists. These officials dispensed an array of benefits to their patriotic proteges: covert funding, access to state property, media coverage, and the assistance of political consultants. In return, nationalists performed at least four services for their benefactors. First, they served as *scarecrows*, a colourful fascist horde who could be used to transform the public narrative about politics into a contest between a virtuous government and its extremist foes. Second, they acted as *violent proxies*, street fighters who could enforce order and intimidate the opposition without tarnishing the regime's democratic credentials. Third, they became *spoilers*, imitative political projects that were designed to weaken the opposition by splitting its electorate and siphoning votes to unelectable rivals. Fourth, nominally independent nationalist politicians and organisations served as *dependent allies*, who could deliver votes to the regime's candidates in return for positions in government or the state apparatus.

However, the Putin regime's manipulation of Russian nationalism differed fundamentally from the schemes of his predecessor. During the 1990s, Boris Yel'tsin was locked in conflict with an 'irreconcilable opposition' of red-brown forces, which rejected his liberal democratic project, and which vilified his government as an 'occupation regime' serving foreign interests and Jewish oligarchs. The Yel'tsin administration responded to this threat by engaging with nationalists. Some were co-opted, either as spoilers or dependent allies. Others served as scarecrows, who lent substance to the regime's anti-fascist posturing. But there was always a vast gulf of distrust that separated the Kremlin under Yel'tsin and its nationalist collaborators. Under Putin, that gulf narrowed. During his early years in power, Putin provided opportunities to nationalists who supported the

reassertion of state power, the reconquest of Chechnya, the taming of the media, and the subjugation of recalcitrant oligarchs. Yel'tsin's 'managed nationalism' was a rearguard action to defend a beleaguered democracy. By contrast, Putin mobilised nationalists against pro-Western liberals who resisted the slide into authoritarianism. His version of 'managed nationalism' was inextricably bound up with the breakdown of democratic institutions.

The politics of nationalism in the Yel'tsin era

Boris Yel'tsin's struggle with Russian nationalism began during the terminal crisis of the Soviet regime, when conservative nationalists and far-right militants began to collaborate with communist hardliners and the security apparatus. The most visible manifestation of this convergence was the Centrist Bloc, an alliance of parties and movements that was clearly intended to serve as screen for a coup. Unveiled in the autumn of 1990, the Centrist Bloc claimed to unite 21 public organisations. One of them was led by Valerii Skurlatov, a veteran Russian nationalist intellectual who had first attracted attention in 1965 as the author of a ten-point Komsomol manifesto that called for the outlawing of sexual relations between Russians and non-Russians.[2] Another was *Otechestvo* ('Fatherland'), a 'Russian patriotic movement' whose programme asserted 'the priority of historical values,' the importance of the Orthodox Church, and the need to strengthen the KGB.[3]

What lent credibility to the Centrist Bloc was its links to Soyuz, the hard-line faction in the Soviet parliament, which united communist hardliners, Russian nationalists from the 'Intermovements' in non-Russian republics, and representatives of the security apparatus. The most menacing of these representatives was Viktor Alksnis, an air force officer nicknamed the 'Black Colonel,' an allusion to the Soviet label for the Greek military junta. In October 1990, Alksnis accompanied leaders of the Centrist Bloc to meetings with the prime minister and the chairman of the parliament.[4] One month later, when Alksnis called in parliament for Gorbachev's resignation and the declaration of a state of emergency, he was loudly endorsed by the bloc.[5] This pattern was repeated in February 1991, when self-styled 'National Salvation Committees' staged abortive coups in the Baltic republics. The bloc responded with a manifesto announcing the formation of its own 'National Salvation Committee' and demanding a ban on all political parties.[6]

Although the Centrist Bloc was ephemeral, it boosted the ascent of one of the leading vehicles of post-Soviet authoritarianism, Vladimir Zhirinovskii's misnamed Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Although his original public persona was a caricature of Boris Yel'tsin's brand of democratic populism, Zhirinovskii quickly adopted radical nationalist themes. As a result, the LDP became a haven for far-right militants, who were attracted by the party's anti-liberal purpose and the opportunity to spend the party coffers. The pattern was set by Viktor Yakushev, a neo-Nazi best known for shocking Muscovites in the mid-1980s with a skinhead rally marking Hitler's birthday in Pushkin Square.[7] As leader of the National-Social Union (NSS), a neo-Nazi splinter group of the Pamyat' Society,

Yakushev had helped to plaster Moscow subways with placards in support of Zhirinovskii's overtly nationalist campaign for the RSFSR presidency in the summer of 1991. Grateful for their contribution to his unexpectedly high result, Zhirinovskii granted three major party posts to NSS militants.[8]

The collapse of the Soviet Union intensified Yel'tsin's conflict with Russian nationalism. By signing the Belovezh' accords, the pact that formalised the dismantlement of the Soviet state, Yel'tsin tarnished his own patriotic credentials. In the eyes of many nationalists, this was an act of treason that made him culpable not only for the loss of historic Russian territories but also for the predicament of 25 million ethnic Russians left stranded in successor states. Yel'tsin's vulnerability was aggravated by the economic crisis and social disruption that accompanied the introduction of market reforms. Some of the most conspicuous beneficiaries of this process were a group of nominally Jewish oligarchs, a development that was exploited by 'red-brown' politicians and anti-Semitic publicists to fabricate conspiracy theories about the president.

At the same time, the end of the Soviet Union made it easier for Yel'tsin's fractious opponents to unite around nationalist slogans. Russian traditionalists could rally alongside communists without contributing to the perpetuation of a Leninist state or condoning its internationalist ideology and history of revolutionary terror. This alliance of extremists, the red-brown 'irreconcilable opposition,' underwent a series of mutations during the 1990s. Its first incarnation was the Russian National Council (Russkii Natsional'nyi Sobor, RNS), which was founded in Nizhnii Novgorod in February 1992. Headed by former KGB general Aleksandr Sterligov, RNS was soon riven by a schism between 'reds' (communists) and 'whites' (nationalists). More durable was the National Salvation Front (Front Natsional'nogo Spaseniya, FNS), which was launched in October 1992 with a grand announcement of a red-white reconciliation. Dedicated to a struggle against 'Russophobia' and Yel'tsin's 'occupation regime,' FNS derived its strength from its status as a mass movement at a time when Democratic Russia, the mainstay of popular resistance to the August 1991 coup, was collapsing. In terms of its regional network and its capacity to summon militant crowds, FNS was becoming the most powerful civic force in the country. Although weakened by the revival of the Communist Party in February 1993 and by the departure of some nationalist organisations at the FNS's second congress four months later, FNS played a conspicuous role in the street clashes that erupted during the intensifying struggle between the president and parliament.[9]

The potency of the red-brown opposition was magnified by the Yel'tsin regime's precarious grip over the 'power ministries' that controlled the armed forces and the security apparatus. During the 1990s, the idea of civilian control over these ministries was often discussed but never achieved. Under these conditions, some security officials were able to defy their 'democratic' masters and cultivate radical nationalist ideologues. One hotbed of insubordination was the Academy of the General Staff, the country's most prestigious military educational institution and the training ground for the officer corps. Under Igor' Rodionov, the hard-line general responsible for the massacre of peaceful demonstrators in Tbilisi in April 1989, the academy became an incubator of far-right ideology and a platform for

its dissemination within the military establishment. Rodionov opened its doors to Aleksandr Dugin, Russia's leading populariser of fascist ideas, who presented a series of lectures to the officer elite.[10] Refined during the course of the decade, these lectures became the basis of Dugin's book *Osnovy geopolitiki* ('Foundations of Geopolitics'), which transmitted his ideas to a much wider audience. On the premises of the academy, Dugin also hosted presentations by other far-right ideologues, including Alain de Benoist, the eminence grise of the French Nouvelle Droite.[11] For his promotion of extremists, Rodionov was repeatedly rebuked by the Defence Minister, but his career did not suffer.[12] Indeed, Rodionov's record of support for the most vehement adversaries of Russia's democratisation was no obstacle to his appointment as Defence Minister in 1996.

Another institutional crucible of red-brown ideology was the 'Russian-American University' (RAU), a think tank that clearly enjoyed backing from the security apparatus.[13] RAU was the brainchild of Aleksei Podberezkin, an international relations expert who promoted a kind of anti-Western, civilisational nationalism. During the early 1990s, RAU provided employment to an array of ideological entrepreneurs who consolidated nationalist ideas in very different sectors of the political landscape. The most influential was RAU's vice-president, Dmitrii Rogozin, the mastermind of a series of ethnonationalist projects. Another was Aleksandr Sterligov, the former KGB general whose RNS was one of the first attempts to unite left and right extremists under nationalist banners. Representing the outlawed Communist Party was Gennadii Zyuganov, an ideological leader of the hard-line anti-Gorbachev opposition. After becoming leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) in 1993, Zyuganov fashioned a party ideology that owed less to Marxism-Leninism than to anti-Western civilisational nationalism.[14] RAU crafted both the platform and the initiative group that was Zyuganov's vehicle for his 1996 presidential campaign.[15]

The point of maximum danger posed by Russian radical nationalism to the Yel'tsin regime was reached during the two weeks of 'dual power' that began with the dissolution of the old parliament on 21 September and culminated in armed conflict in Moscow on 3–4 October 1993. Ultranationalist militants were a conspicuous presence amongst the defenders of the parliament, which voted to impeach Yel'tsin and appoint a new cabinet. The key role of Defence Minister was filled by Vladislav Achalov, a former Soviet general and an ardent believer in Jewish–Masonic conspiracy theories.[16] Neo-Nazi militants from Aleksandr Barkashov's RNE (Russian National Unity) provided the backbone of the parliament's security force and held regular drills in the parliament grounds.[17] The National Salvation Front organised the large demonstration on 3 October 1993, which broke through police cordons around the parliament.[18] In the ensuing armed conflict, radical nationalists formed the core of the parliamentary insurgency. The first skirmish took place at the mayor's building, which was stormed by a contingent of insurgents that included 15 RNE fighters.[19] That evening, former general Albert Makashov, a fanatical anti-Semite, led the failed assault on the Ostankino television complex.

The Yelt'sin administration's public response to the nationalist threat was to adopt the mantle of anti-fascism. As tanks were shelling the parliament on the

morning of 4 October, the president claimed that the uprising had been planned by 'communist revanchists, fascist ringleaders, and some former deputies and representatives of the Soviets.'[20] This version of events was supported loudly by an open letter in *Izvestiya* signed by 42 prominent intellectuals, who deplored the fact that 'fascists have taken up arms, trying to seize power' and demanded the suppression of 'all forms of communist and nationalist parties, fronts, and associations.'[21] The Kremlin did not take long to respond. In an address to the nation, Yel'tsin expressed outrage about the role of 'fascists and communists, the swastika and the hammer and sickle' in the uprising, which was aimed at establishing 'a bloody communist-fascist dictatorship in Russia.'[22] These words were followed by the suspension of no less than 16 'red-brown' political organisations.[23]

In the aftermath of the October Events, anti-fascist posturing became an important tool of legitimation for the Yel'tsin regime. It served both to redirect media attention from regime's problems and to burnish the president's image as a guardian against the fascist menace. One regular foil for official anti-fascist indignation was Vladimir Zhirinovskii, whose success in the December 1993 Duma elections provoked pro-Kremlin parties to propose an 'anti-fascist' coalition to defend democracy.[24] Another foil was RNE, the neo-Nazi organisation whose fighters had played a conspicuous role in the parliamentary uprising. In early 1995, when Yel'tsin's reputation in liberal circles was tarnished by the invasion of Chechnya, a television exposé of the organisation featured the RNE militant Aleksei Vedenkin, who on air, threatened to execute two prominent democratic deputies. The furore became a pretext for Yel'tsin to issue a highly publicised decree against fascism.[25]

Behind the scenes, however, the relationship between the Presidential Administration and Russian nationalism was more complex. While some officials were raising the alarm about the fascist menace, others were negotiating with far-right elements. Despite the anti-fascist panic that followed the 1993 elections, the Presidential Administration soon reached an accommodation with Vladimir Zhirinovskii's LDPR. At home, Zhirinovskii contributed to the lowering of political tension by signing the Agreement on Public Accord (*Dogovor ob obshchestvennom soglasii*), an attempt by the Kremlin to lay down new rules of political contestation.[26] On the international stage, Zhirinovskii served the goals of Russian diplomacy by demonstrating to US President Bill Clinton and to other Western leaders the necessity of supporting Yel'tsin, in spite of their misgivings about rampant corruption and the concentration of power in the Kremlin.[27] In July 1995, the LDPR affirmed its loyalty to Yel'tsin by blocking an attempt by the Communist Party to impeach the president. Suddenly sentimental, Zhirinovskii warned that this move would be 'simply indecent' in light of Yel'tsin's recent hospitalisation.[28] Such public solicitude reflected the growing connections behind the scenes between the LDPR and the Presidential Administration. According the LDPR's deputy leader, Aleksandr Vengerovskii, 'Yel'tsin's people like to use us as bogeymen in public, but in private we work together on many issues and have normal personal relations.'[29]

More problematic is the relationship between the Presidential Administration and Barkashov's RNE. During the political crisis of September-October 1993, the

displays of swastikas and raised arm salutes by RNE fighters in the grounds of the parliament raised suspicions that Barkashov was colluding with the Kremlin to discredit Yel'tsin's adversaries.[30] These suspicions were aggravated by RNE's acquisition of a headquarters in Il'inka street, a short walk from the Kremlin in a district dominated by government buildings.[31] The most likely Kremlin patron of RNE was Aleksandr Korzhakov, the head of the Presidential Security Service and one of Yel'tsin's closest confidants. In a major study of the rise and fall of RNE, Vyacheslav Likhachev and Vladimir Pribylovskii argue that Korzhakov used Barkashov as a tool of political provocation. This case rests upon two pieces of evidence. The first is an interview with Yurii Belyaev, the leader of a succession of neo-Nazi groupuscules. Belyaev claimed to have warned Barkashov about the presence of figures from the security services around RNE. According to Belyaev, Barkashov responded that 'these special services have begun to pay us money' and 'I want to rise on their money, to create a powerful structure, and then cut off their heads.'[32]

The second piece of evidence concerns a so-called 'bandit raid' on RNE headquarters on 3 April 1995. A group of intruders, heavily armed and masked, tied Barkashov to a chair and coerced him to make an abject apology to the Jews. To Barkashov's embarrassment, a video recording of this apology was leaked to the muckraking journalist Aleksandr Khinshtein, who promptly published a transcript in the mass-circulation newspaper *Moskovskii komsomolets*. The victim had no doubt that his humiliation was organised by the Presidential Administration. In an interview, Barkashov claimed that the 'bandit raid' was Korzhakov's revenge for Barkashov's intransigence during negotiations about the creation of a Kremlin-backed nationalist alliance.[33]

There is no doubt that the Kremlin-backed the creation of such an alliance, which revolved around the Congress of Russian Communities (KRO). The brainchild of Dmitrii Rogozin, KRO had been established in 1992 as a network of Russian organisations across the former Soviet space. It acquired credibility in nationalist circles by defending ethnic Russian victims of persecution in the new post-Soviet republics.[34] In the wake of the bloodshed of October 1993, KRO began to fill the political vacuum left by the collapse of the red-brown bloc. No other political organisation rivalled KRO's institutional clout and its authority in nationalist circles. On the one hand, its leadership included a array of prominent public figures with experience of government and connections in the security apparatus. The most significant was Yurii Skokov, the first chairman of Russia's National Security Council and a leading contender for the post of prime minister in 1992. On the other, KRO became a rallying point for Russian nationalists. Its public functions attracted large crowds of militants from across the former Soviet space. One of them, the nationalist ideologue Aleksandr Sevast'yanov, would later wistfully recall the 'grandiose congresses' of KRO's heyday:

> I remember how many wonderful Russian people, genuine nationalists, participated in these events, to which they travelled from all the corners of our Motherland. I remember how many hopes we tied to KRO, how we wanted to believe in a common goal, a common victory.[35]

KRO played a major role in the Kremlin's strategy for the 1995 Duma elections. According to Konstantin Zatulin, who lobbied bankers to support the party, $18 m was funnelled into KRO's coffers from offshore accounts controlled by the Kremlin.[36] The promotion of KRO served the Yel'tsin regime in at least two ways. First, KRO was envisioned as a reserve 'party of power': an insurance policy against the defeat of the principal loyalist project, Viktor Chernomyrdin's Our Home is Russia; and a counterweight to Chernomyrdin's own presidential ambitions. Second, KRO was intended to weaken the vote for rival nationalist formations headed by leaders of the 1993 uprising.[37] At Skokov's prompting, KRO's actual campaign was managed by a team of political technologists – Yurii Zapol,' Gleb Pavlovskii and Marat Gel'man – from the Kremlin-linked PR agency, Video International.[38] For Pavlovskii, the campaign was 'one of the most successful and massive.' Its impact was magnified by the paralysis of the Russian state, which produced a demand for ideas about Russia as a great power, patriotism, and the restoration of order. In a moment of self-congratulation over a decade later, Pavlovskii boasted that these ideas, popularised by KRO, were later adopted for Putin.[39]

KRO's ambition was not matched by political success. For some time, Skokov's team had anticipated that KRO would emerge as a dominant force in the new Duma. For consultants like Pavlovskii, the only uncertainty was whether KRO would come first or second in the elections. What dispelled these expectations was Skokov's visit to the United States, where he publicly boasted of his ambition to replace not only Chernomyrdin but also Yel'tsin. In retaliation, the Presidential Administration cut off all support.[40] On election night, KRO garnered 4.3% of the vote, insufficient to win seats on the proportional lists but sufficient to thwart its nationalist rivals. The result was an unexpected but resounding triumph for the Communist Party, which gained over 100 seats and became the largest party in the Duma.

Despite this debacle, KRO became central to Yel'tsin's strategy for re-election in 1996. Gleb Pavlovskii's polling had shown that the potential centre-right electorate could defeat the communists, but that Yel'tsin could not capture it alone. To lure these voters into the Kremlin's camp, the oligarchs who bankrolled the Kremlin's election campaign settled on Aleksandr Lebed,' the renegade commander of the 14th army in Transdniester, who had joined KRO after his dismissal from the armed forces in 1995. Although in public Lebed' posed as an opponent of the regime, the terms of his candidacy had been agreed at a secret meeting with Boris Berezovskii, which was also attended by Dmitrii Rogozin.[41] Although the precise terms of the pact are unknown, there is no doubt that Lebed' traded electoral success for political concessions. Boosted by lavish funding and favourable coverage in the Kremlin-aligned media, Lebed came third in the first round of the presidential election. He promptly accepted appointment as chairman of the National Security Council. Soon afterwards, Yel'tsin replaced Defence Minister Andrei Grachev with Lebed's KRO ally, Igor' Rodionov, the general who had transformed the General Staff Academy into a laboratory of radical nationalist ideology. In response, Lebed' exhorted his supporters to vote for Yel'tsin in the second round. This gesture lent credibility to Yel'tsin's victory

over Zyuganov, but it was devastating for KRO. Rank-and-file militants were outraged by Lebed's manipulation of the electorate and his contribution to the survival of a regime they despised. Aleksandr Sevast'yanov would later reflect that it was 'impossible to convey the utter revulsion, which all honest members of KRO felt at this dirty game.'[42] The compromised organisation soon disappeared from the political landscape.

Despite its anti-fascist posturing and its efforts at co-optation, the Yel'tsin administration struggled to contain nationalism during the second half of the 1990s. The most powerful forces in the Duma were Zyuganov's KPRF and Zhirinovskii's LDPR, which offered platforms to radical nationalists, promoted nationalist causes, and obstructed liberal reform. It was the KPRF that pushed through legislation on Freedom of Conscience, which institutionalised the ascendancy of the Russian Orthodox Church and weakened the provisions on religious freedom in the 1993 constitution. More ominous was the rise of nationalist leaders from the armed forces, where disaffection was aggravated by defeat in Chechnya. The most visible sign of this disaffection was the creation of the Movement in Support of Army, whose leadership included nationalist generals like Igor' Rodionov and Al'bert Makashov.[43] In public space, the fraying of state power was dramatised by a surge of skinhead violence and by the increasing collaboration between RNE and regional administrations.[44]

The nationalist onslaught intensified during the terminal crisis of the Yel'tsin regime. Attempts to manage the succession were complicated by two major convulsions. The first was the financial collapse of August 1998, which shattered confidence in market reform and discredited the government of liberal 'young reformers.' Under pressure from a hostile Duma, Yel'tsin replaced them with a government headed by Evgenii Primakov, the first of three premiers with a background in the security apparatus. The second convulsion was NATO's war against Serbia over Kosovo, which galvanised Russian nationalists. In the Duma, in the media, and in the streets, they led a pro-Serbia protest campaign. A series of increasingly inflammatory resolutions, ranging from demands for military assistance to a plan for the absorption of Yugoslavia into the Russia-Belarus Union, were adopted by large majorities in the Duma.[45] At the same time, prominent nationalist deputies. including Sergei Baburin, Vladimir Zhirinovskii, and Aleksei Podberezkin, claimed to be recruiting volunteers to fight NATO on the ground.[46] Others took the struggle to the streets. Large crowds rallied outside the US embassy, which was subjected to a week of picketing by an assortment of communists, nationalists, and football hooligans.[47] This mobilisation lent force to the Duma's most serious attempt to oust Yel'tsin. An impeachment petition, which had been launched a year earlier by the leaders of the Movement in Support of the Army, gained enough signatures for the case to be heard in May 1999. Although communist deputies made the vote possible, nationalist orators like Sergei Baburin led the attack on the president on the floor of the parliament.[48] In the end, Yel'tsin was saved by Zhirinovskii's support, but the president's authority and legitimacy were crumbling. In opinion polls, he rarely exceeded low single digits. He was rejected by liberals, opposed by many regional leaders, and vilified by the communists. No less ominous was the coalescence of a powerful

elite faction around the recently sacked premier Evgenii Primakov and Moscow mayor Yurii Luzhkov. There was every reason to expect the demise not only of Yel'tsin's regime, but of the system he had founded. What saved it was the emergence of a leader who was capable of taking the patriotic wind out of his opponents' sails.

First Overtures

The rise of Vladimir Putin to the presidency fundamentally altered the Kremlin's relationship to Russian nationalism. The reassertion of state power, which was symbolised by the invasion of Chechnya in late 1999, enabled the new leader to wrap himself in the mantle of patriotism. In the process, he deprived the regime's nationalist critics of longstanding grievances and a large part of their constituency. They could not compete with vivid images of a vigorous young president arriving by jet fighter in the war zone, fraternising with the troops, and promising to destroy the enemy. Nationalists were also trapped by the logic of their own demands. They felt compelled to support the war effort and a leader who had renounced the humiliation of the 1996 peace settlement.

Disoriented by this unexpected turn of events, Russian nationalists lost ground in the election cycle of 1999–2000. Some were obstructed by state action. The most prominent victim was the SPAS bloc, a radical nationalist alliance that had been created by the merger of a group of LDPR deputies and the neo-Nazi RNE. Provocatively, SPAS's electoral list was headed by the RNE leader, Aleksandr Barkashov. To stymie a red-brown resurgence, the authorities deregistered SPAS three weeks before the poll.[49] Other nationalists were decisively rejected at the ballot box. None of the five remaining nationalist formations won more than 1% of the popular vote. The most successful was KRO, once a contender for power but now a marginal force (0.62%). It was closely followed by the All-Russian Patriotic Movement 'In Support of the Army,' which had spearheaded the move for Yel'tsin's impeachment (0.59%). The others trailed far behind: the Russian All-People's Union, headed by Sergei Baburin (0.36%); the 'Movement of Patriotic Forces – Russian Cause,' which united Yel'tsin's former security chief Aleksandr Korzhakov and an array of far-right militants (0.18%); and Spiritual Heritage, the platform of Aleksei Podberezkin (0.1%).[50] In the concurrent Moscow mayoral poll, Dmitrii Vasil'ev, the veteran leader of Pamyat,' received 1.1% of the vote.[51] The nationalist rout was completed at the presidential election in March 2000, where the leading nationalist candidate, the film director Stanislav Govorukhin, received a humiliating 0.45%, followed by Aleksei Podberezkin, with 0.14%.[52]

In victory, however, Putin was magnanimous. Within months of his inauguration, he sent a strong signal to the Russian far-right. On 10 August 2000, he granted an audience to two notorious tribunes of the red-brown opposition of 1990s: Aleksandr Prokhanov, the editor of *Zavtra*, and Valentin Chikin, editor of *Sovetskaya Rossiya*. The meeting appears to have been inspired by a published dialogue between the two editors in which Prokhanov praised Putin for fighting on multiple fronts against the nation's internal and external enemies. Prokhanov

was particularly effusive about Putin's 'war' on the liberal television station, NTV, which he portrayed, in characteristically anti-Semitic and conspiratorial terms, as 'a war with the International Jewish Congress as a whole, and with the enormous force that rules, dominates the world, and which is represented in Russia by NTV and [its owner Vladimir] Gusinskii.'[53] Although little was revealed about Prokhanov's discussion with the new president, it provoked horror in liberal circles. One publicist lamented that Putin had elevated Prokhanov, a pariah who was 'not tolerated by polite society,' to the same level as the editors of mainstream newspapers.[54]

The end of Prokhanov's ostracism marked the beginning of a complex negotiating process in which both sides made concessions. Although aware that the Kremlin was seeking to co-opt him, Prokhanov welcomed the attention. High-level recognition signalled an end to his marginal status. In an interview, he reflected on the symbiotic nature of the emerging relationship between the regime and the far-right:

> It seems to me that Putin is engaged in a complex manipulation of all the strategic resources in the country, and he regards us as an object of manipulation. Of course, this linkage would be no less useful to us than to Putin. We were always trying to get out of the pit into which we had been driven. How many times they have closed the newspaper! With the coming of Putin we have come of that pit.[55]

To be manipulated was an opportunity to enter the mainstream of public debate. In return for praising the president, Prokhanov could bring his brand of ethno-imperialism to a wider audience than ever before. Outside 'the pit,' in the public arena, he could demonise his liberal adversaries and the West; he could also help to shape the inchoate ideology of the new order.

One month after his encounter with Prokhanov, Putin made another genuflection to a nationalist icon. On 20 September 2000, he visited Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn at his home at Troitse-Lykovo. It was far from self-evident that the president, proud of his KGB past, and the dissident writer, author of searing denunciations of the Soviet repressive organs, would find common ground. But like Prokhanov, Solzhenitsyn was a vociferous critic of the oligarchs whose power was being destroyed by the new regime. The substance of Solzhenitsyn's conversation with Putin remained private, but it paved the way for a public endorsement. In an interview with the state-run *Rossiya* television network, Solzhenitsyn lavished praise on Putin's character and prudence. Not only was the new leader devoid of 'any personal thirst for power,' but his decisions and judgements were marked by 'extraordinary caution and balance.'[56]

These overtures coincided with moves to integrate nationalists into the Kremlin's information arena. Putin's first year in power witnessed the re-establishment of state domination over Russia's media landscape. Within weeks of the president's inauguration, the Kremlin alarmed the liberal intelligentsia by unleashed a war of attrition against Vladimir Gusinskii's Most group, which controlled bastions of the liberal media like NTV and the newspaper *Segodnya*. What attracted

less attention was the regime's sponsorship of a plethora of internet sites that offered platforms for illiberal political tendencies. The architect of this information revolution was Gleb Pavlovskii, the political technologist who had designed KRO's Duma campaign in 1995, and who now directed the Foundation for Effective Politics (FEP). The most important of these websites was strana.ru, a 24-hour internet news service, which was launched on 20 September 2000, the same day as Putin's meeting with Solzhenitsyn. The project's main platform was a national website and seven regional sites serving federal districts.[57] Both in terms of the volume of news and the prominence of its expert commentators, strana.ru was a serious challenge to the mainstream media. There was no doubt about Kremlin backing for strana.ru, which boasted that it had been created 'in cooperation with the federal authorities and relies on the support of the state mass media.'[58]

Central to Pavlovskii's strategy was the incorporation of nationalists into a new 'Putin majority.' In a manifesto titled 'Our Information Strategy,' Pavlovskii argued that the existing media regime 'had formed on the basis of a de facto ban on information activity by the communist, nationalist, and social-democratic parts of the political spectrum.' This exclusion was 'one of the main reasons for the information degradation, corruption and decline of right [liberal] forces.'[59] To correct this state of affairs, strana.ru offered space to an array of far-right intellectuals. One of Pavlovskii's earliest proteges was Aleksandr Dugin, the neo-fascist ideologue who had been unable to convert his elite connections into public influence. In November 2000, Dugin endorsed the new order by hailing Putin's visits to Mongolia and Brunei as 'the beginning of a new Eurasianist course' and 'a turning of Russian politics away from Atlanticism.'[60] In return for his praise of the president, Dugin became a regular contributor to strana.ru.[61] His presence on the Kremlin-backed site facilitated his transformation from a marginal pariah into a respected commentator, one of the phalanx of loyalist experts who would dominate political talk shows on Kremlin-aligned television during the coming decade.

Dugin's emergence as an ally of the regime was confirmed by the launching of his 'International Eurasia Movement' (MED) in May 2001. From the outset, MED flaunted its loyalty to the president. It officially described itself as a 'movement in support of the reforms of the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin.'[62] The walls at the founding congress were hung with placards quoting not only Dugin but also Putin's affirmation of Russia's Eurasian identity.[63] In his speech, Dugin signalled his loyalty to the Kremlin by lambasting its adversaries in the 'media-ocracy' and praising the president for decapitating the tentacles of the 'Atlanticist hydra.'[64] No less obvious were MED's links to the security apparatus. The founding congress was held at 'Honour and Dignity' club, an association of veterans of the security forces. According to one journalist, the audience was dominated by middle aged men with short haircuts and the demeanour of officers.[65] In an interview, Dugin boasted that 'we have a significant number of veterans of the special services – these are energetic (*passionarnye*), intelligent, business-like people – the elite of our state.'[66] They included Petr Suslov, a colonel in the SVR until 1995, and General Nikolai Klokotov, chair of strategy at the General Staff's Military Academy until 1996.[67]

The promotion of loyalist neo-fascist intellectuals like Dugin coincided with a crackdown on their anti-Kremlin counterparts. The principal target was Eduard

Limonov, the enfant terrible of the red-brown movement, who had co-founded the National-Bolshevik Party (NBP) with Dugin in 1994. Limonov had tried and failed to reach an accommodation with the new regime. Shortly before Putin's election, Limonov had even offered his party's services to the FSB as an instrument of Russian power in the former Soviet space.[68] In March 2001, the FSB arrested Limonov on charges of plotting an armed insurrection in Kazakhstan. Although based on flimsy evidence, the accusation was not implausible. The NBP celebrated revolutionary violence, glorified famous terrorists, and staged regular actions in the former Soviet space. Its doctrine of 'A Second Russia' (*Vtoraya Rossiya*) proposed that the establishment of a revolutionary enclave in a post-Soviet state might become a springboard for a national revolution.[69]

The Limonov case became a pretext for the resumption of the Yel'tsin-era push for anti-extremism legislation. The initiative was foreshadowed by Putin in his annual address to the State Duma in April 2002, when he identified extremists as 'those who under fascist and nationalist slogans and symbols organise pogroms, assault and kill people.'[70] The original draft of the law, submitted to the Duma in June, was criticised by both human rights activists and by communists as a threat to civil society.[71] But it was loudly endorsed by some prominent liberals. They included Pavel Krasheninnikov, a Union of Right Forces deputy who as Justice Minister in 1999 had tried unsuccessfully to introduce an earlier version of the law. According to Krasheninnikov, the law would make it possible 'to fight more effectively against manifestations of fascism' and provide security agencies with 'additional instruments in the struggle against Nazis and other scum.'[72] The law, signed by Putin on 28 July 2002, established two important new procedures for combatting extremism. First, it enabled state functionaries to seek court rulings to ban organisations that engaged in 'extremist activity' (Article 10). Second, it provided for the closure of media outlets that had been found guilty of publishing 'extremist materials' twice in the course of a year (Article 13). Although the law's definition of extremism was dangerously expansive, it clearly specified some forms of activity and propaganda practised by ultra-nationalists. These included the debasement of national dignity, actions motivated by racial and religious hatred, and the propaganda of racial superiority.[73]

The adoption of the anti-extremism law contributed to the deregistration of the National Great Power Party of Russia (Natsional-Derzhavnaya Partiya Rossii, NDPR), a party that represented the first serious attempt to unite radical nationalists against the Putin regime. NDPR was headed by a triumvirate of firebrands: Stanislav Terekhov, the neo-Stalinist leader of the Union of Officers; Aleksandr Sevast'yanov, the nationalist ideologue and biological racist; and Boris Mironov, an anti-Semitic former press minister. What lent menace to their joint project was the NDPR's absorption of the cadres of many branches of the defunct RNE, the major neo-Nazi organisation of the 1990s. At NDPR's founding congress, Sevast'yanov hinted at the possibility of armed struggle:

> The contradiction today between legal and illegal methods of struggle is as great as ever … But, dear friends, illegal methods of struggle are not publicly discussed … Here sit a multitude of representatives of RNE. These are

> tough nationalists, and we understand that we have succeeded in doing what our enemies fear so much and what was so difficult to do – we are creating a united movement, a united platform, and we sit here today, representatives of different ideologies, but representatives of Russian blood. The National-Great Power Party of Russia is the party of vengeance.[74]

Despite this inflammatory rhetoric, the 'party of vengeance' was registered on 26 September 2002, almost exactly two months after the adoption of the law on extremism.[75] The result was a public scandal that provoked the embarrassed Justice Minister to put an end to the party's electoral aspirations. In January 2003, he issued an official warning that a call by Boris Mironov to disenfranchise Russian Jews was 'an incitement to national discord.'[76] The coup de grace was delivered in April 2003, when the membership lists of 15 NDPR branches were disqualified. The effect was that the party no longer satisfied the threshold of branches in 45 subjects of the federation, as stipulated by the new law on political parties.[77] This intervention, which was criticised by some human rights activists, testified to the government's readiness to crush manifestations of nationalism that represented a clear danger to the system.

Idushchie Vmeste

The anti-extremism initiatives of the early 2000s overlapped with a parallel campaign to influence the politics of Russian youth. While the security organs targeted Limonov's NBP and other radical youth organisations, the Kremlin created its first loyalist youth organisation, Idushchie Vmeste ('Moving Together'). Launched in July 2000, Idushchie Vmeste was the brainchild of Vasilii Yakemenko, a functionary who until November 2000 worked in the Internal Department of the Presidential Administration.[78] In many ways, Idushchie Vmeste was the antithesis of the NBP's radicalism. It had no coherent ideology. To attract new members, it offered pagers, free internet access and holidays.[79] No less unconventional was its public activity. Although Idushchie Vmeste encouraged a kind of blind leader worship amongst youths parading in t-shirts bearing Putin's image, its activism revolved around immorality in the cultural sphere. This crusade reached its height at a rally outside the Bolshoi Theatre in July 2002, when activists tossed 'pornographic' post-modernist novels by Vladimir Sorokin into an enormous, paper mâché toilet.[80]

Despite its apolitical façade, Idushchie Vmeste was to play an important role in the development of the Putin regime's 'managed nationalism.' For several years, it employed football gangs and elements of far-right subcultures as loyalist crowds and as a security force. In the process, it brought members of those subcultures into the emerging system of Kremlin proxy organisations. It also pioneered the manipulation of extremists by curators, whose own links to the regime were obscured by their formally independent status.

Idushchie Vmeste's cultivation of the far-right was facilitated by the xenophobic undertones of its public rhetoric. At a time when the Kremlin was publicly committed to liberal reform, Idushchie Vmeste demonstrated a pronounced

hostility towards the West. This hostility was on display on 7 May 2001 at one of the movement's major events, a celebration in Vasil'evskii Spusk, under the walls of Kremlin, to mark first anniversary of Putin's inauguration as president. In his speech to the crowd, Vasilii Yakemenko provoked cheers when he proclaimed that 'youth has at last turned its face to Russia, and towards the West they have turned you know what.' Behind this crude witticism lay a fundamental ideological reorientation. 'Youth understands,' explained Yakemenko, 'that the main thing today is not the values of the West, but the preservation of the system of relations bequeathed to us by history itself. This is the Russian character.' Once again, the crowd erupted with applause.[81]

Much of the coverage of this spectacle focused on participants' identical Putin t-shirts, but some observers were alarmed by the demeanour of these defenders of the Russian character. A reporter for *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* noted the anxiety of 'several frightened citizens, who through naivete perceived the young supporters of the president as skinheads because of their shaven heads.'[82] In fact, these 'frightened citizens' had noticed something that the reporter had missed. Idushchie Vmeste had developed a connection with football gangs, whose subculture overlapped with that of skinheads.

At least one of the Idushchie Vmeste's most senior functionaries, Aleksei Mitryushin, was deeply connected to the football gang subculture. He was a former leader of Gallant Steeds, a gang comprising fans of the team TsSKA. Mitryushin headed Idushchie Vmeste's branch for north-east Moscow. Interviewed by the writer Sergei Shargunov in 2002, Mitryushin claimed that his days as a gang leader were over. Acknowledging that his superiors knew about his past, he pleaded with Shargunov to turn a blind eye to a youthful indiscretion: 'if this gets into the press, my career will collapse.'[83] In fact, Mitryushin's career prospered after Shargunov exposed the dark side of his curriculum vitae. As the manipulation of nationalists became increasingly important for the Kremlin's domination of the political arena, Mitryushin became a curator, an intermediary between the regime and far-right subcultures.

Despite Mitryushin's efforts to draw a line between his street fighting years and his new career as a pro-Kremlin militant, there is evidence that Idushchie Vmeste actively courted the support of skinhead gangs. Shargunov interviewed a police officer who had observed skinheads concealing Nazi accessories as they merged with the crowd marching towards the Kremlin for Idushchie Vmeste's demonstration on 7 May 2002, the second anniversary of Putin's inauguration. The event had been promoted as a moment when Russian youth would pay tribute to the warriors who repelled Nazi invaders during the Great Patriotic War. In the police officer's sarcastic account, the reality was more sinister:

> Confident columns approach Red Square. Adolescents get rid of swastika markings, unclip "White Power" badges, hide their black windcheater jackets in backpacks. They put on t-shirts with the [Putin] face and the sacramental: "Everything is alright!" [*Vsem putem!*] And next … Naturally they go to celebrate the grey-haired veterans.[84]

According to Shargunov, Idushchie Vmeste was not merely a passive victim of neo-Nazi infiltration. On the contrary, it had deliberately enlisted skinheads as a fighting force. Shargunov's main evidence was a video cassette of an interview recorded by a television journalist with a fighter from OB-88, the notorious skinhead gang. The interview was never broadcast, perhaps because its contents were difficult to corroborate and risked provoking the ire of the Kremlin at a time when it was remorselessly subjugating the television media.[85]

The anonymous fighter claimed that there was a mutually beneficial but far from harmonious relationship between Idushchie Vmeste and OB-88. 'Idushchie Vmeste got in contact with us,' he recalled. 'They use us, but we have our own interests, financial ones.' On one occasion, 'there was a meeting in defence of NTV at Ostankino, and we were ordered to disrupt it.' To this end, '[Idushchie Vmeste] dispensed a certain amount of money [and] flare-guns.'[86] This was a dangerous tactic because skinheads were difficult to control. In October 2001, according to the interviewee, Idushchie Vmeste 'again dispensed money [and] implements' to OB-88. The designated target was a mob of anti-globalisation militants whose alleged plans to disrupt a meeting of the World Economic Forum in Moscow had been widely publicised in the media.[87] In fact the anti-globalisation protest never materialised. 'So, the assignment was changed,' explained the interviewee. Armed and ready to fight, the crowd of skinheads was directed by OB-88 leaders to Tsaritsyno market, where they staged a brutal pogrom against a more traditional target: immigrant traders from the Caucasus, Central Asia, and China. By the time that the rampage had ended, four were dead, and dozens had been injured.[88]

Shargunov's exposé was clearly a major embarrassment for Idushchie Vmeste. *Novaya Gazeta* reported that it had been contacted by the General Prosecutor's Office and that Shargunov was ready to speak to its investigators.[89] Unsurprisingly, there was no serious inquiry into Idushchie Vmeste's relations with OB-88 or the broader skinhead milieu. No functionaries of Idushchie Vmeste were called to testify at the trial of Mikhail Volkov, the leader of OB-88, and other perpetrators of the Tsaritsyno pogrom. Despite this impunity, Idushchie Vmeste appeared to have been chastened by the scandal. During 2003–4, its activities shifted to propaganda campaigns against the Kremlin's critics. In an effort to discredit leading liberal newspapers, Idushchie Vmeste arranged for the publication in their pages of articles that included the phrase, 'We publish lies and commissioned material for money.'[90] Another campaign revolved around legal action against literary figures whom Idushchie Vmeste accused of 'pornography.' The moral credibility of this crusade was undermined in 2004 when the former leader of the organisation's St. Petersburg branch was prosecuted for the production of pornography.[91] In many ways, Idushchie Vmeste had become a liability for its sponsors.

Nevertheless, Idushchie Vmeste's flirtation with the skinhead underground was an important precedent for the development of 'managed nationalism.' On the level of praxis, Idushchie Vmeste demonstrated that the aggression of the skinhead milieu could be used as a political weapon. On the level of personnel, it brought figures from the far-right subculture into the apparatus of the Kremlin's

proxy youth organisations. As we will see in Chapter 3, Idushchie Vmeste became a prototype for Nashi ('Ours') and an array of loyalist proxies that were intended as counterweights to the threat of democratic revolution. Some of them became platforms for far-right militants.

Rodina

One year after Idushchie Vmeste's entanglement with skinheads, the Kremlin's political technologists embarked upon a more ambitious and public effort to harness the energies of Russian nationalism. Their aim was to ensure the consolidation of the new regime in the election cycle of 2003–4, an outcome that was far from assured. Russia's 'party of power,' Edinaya Rossiya, possessed neither effective leadership, nor a coherent message, while its adversaries in the Duma appeared to have been galvanised by the regime's authoritarian trajectory. The KPRF, with over 100 deputies, was still a force to be reckoned with. The liberal parties were increasingly alienated by the regime's record on human rights, media freedom and civil liberties. On the streets, a broad coalition of radical and liberal youth militants was beginning to coalesce.

During 2003, the Kremlin conducted a multi-pronged campaign to pacify the political landscape. Its most potent weapons were a swarm of 'spoilers,' loyalist parties and blocs that were designed to siphon away votes from the KPRF. Some of these spoilers, such as the Pensioners' Party, were intended to weaken the KPRF's position as a defender of social welfare. Others were led by nationalists, who had been recruited to reverse Gennadii Zyuganov's success in capturing the 'patriotic' vote. One of the most controversial was Aleksandr Dugin's Eurasia movement, which was converted into a party at its second congress in May 2002. In an apparent sign of official favour, the congress was attended by a representative of the Presidential Administration's Department for Cooperation with Political Parties and Movements, who greeted the delegates in the name of the entire Presidential Administration.[92]

However, Dugin's initiative was soon overshadowed by a rival, Kremlin-sponsored Eurasianist venture, the 'Eurasianist Party of Russia' (EPR). This 'clone' was headed by a no less notorious figure. Pavel Borodin, the State Secretary of the Russia-Belarus Union, was best known for having been arrested in New York, extradited to Switzerland, and convicted on money-laundering charges.[93] In his public rhetoric, Borodin positioned himself as an adversary of radical nationalists and a proponent of ethnic tolerance, but his party clearly appealed to a nationalist constituency. It participated in the Duma elections as part of a 'Great Russia – Eurasian Union' (VR-ES) bloc, and its list of candidates featured Leonid Ivashov, the Russian nationalist army officer who had orchestrated the famous 'Dash to Pristina' in the aftermath of the Kosovo War.[94] As a conventional political bloc, VR-ES was an ignominious failure. But as a 'spoiler,' designed to siphon votes away from the Kremlin's main adversary, it was a qualified success.

All of these ephemeral projects were eclipsed by the Rodina bloc, which became a major parliamentary force. Conceived as a 'left-patriotic' antidote to the Communist Party, Rodina was originally branded '*Tovarishch*' ('Comrade')

as a vehicle for Sergei Glaz'ev, a former minister of foreign economic relations, whose meandering political trajectory had taken him from the Democratic Party of Russia to the leadership of the Socialist Unity Party, and election on the KPRF's Duma list in 1999. Despite his leftist affiliations, Glaz'ev had a long history of involvement with the far-right, including a term as chairman of KRO and cooperation with the US-based Larouche movement.[95] Soon Glaz'ev was joined by the veteran nationalist politician Dmitrii Rogozin, the mastermind of KRO and the chair of the Duma's foreign affairs committee, who had developed cordial relations with the Kremlin as a result of his service as Presidential Representative on Kaliningrad during negotiations over the EU's eastward enlargement.[96]

From the outset, Rodina was an unstable amalgam of leftists and nationalists. Its leftist component was represented by figures like Oleg Shein and Mikhail Markelov, both of whom became adversaries of Russian ultra-nationalists.[97] They were outnumbered, however, by a large contingent of nationalists, whose preponderance was increased by a reshuffle of Rodina's constituent organisations. In the autumn of 2003, the Russian Party of Labour collapsed. Its place in Rodina was taken by Sergei Baburin's *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Will), a radical nationalist party created in 2001 from the wreckage of the ultranationalist SPAS bloc.[98]

During the summer of 2003, a diverse array of ultra-nationalists were drawn into the preparations for Rodina. The first was the Eurasia Party of Aleksandr Dugin, the neo-fascist intellectual who had been ushered into the regime's information space by Pavlovskii.[99] Ironically for a populariser of fascist ideas, Dugin abandoned the bloc in September, complaining that competition with nationalists had driven Glaz'ev into 'an alliance with rightist chauvinists.'[100] This indignation may have owed less to principle than to the Eurasianists' relegation to a low position in the bloc's electoral list, but Dugin's diagnosis was accurate.[101] Radical nationalists occupied a prominent place amongst Rodina's candidates. The most militant came from Baburin's Narodnaya Volya, which nominated no less than seven former candidates of SPAS, the far-right alliance that had been barred from the 1999 Duma election.[102] Apparently under Kremlin pressure, the most odious of Rodina's candidates – some 20 in total – were replaced before polling day.[103]

Despite this purge, the new bloc was dominated by Russian nationalists. One of the most influential was Andrei Savel'ev, a veteran militant and the co-author of KRO's founding declaration. No less significant was the presence of a cluster of Russian Orthodox civilisational nationalists, who included Nataliya Narochnitskaya (a leading cultural relativist critic of universal human rights), Aleksandr Chuev (the Duma's leading defender of 'the feelings of religious believers'), and Aleksandr Krutov (the presenter of *Russkii Dom*, a television programme that was one of the most important platforms of Orthodox values).[104]

There is no doubt that Rodina was backed by the Presidential Administration. According to Rogozin, he raised the idea of the new bloc after a meeting with Putin to discuss the Kaliningrad negotiations.[105] The president's verbal approval transformed Rogozin into the bloc's 'curator,' both a supervisor and a guarantor of its loyalty. In the words of the political technologist Sergei Markov, Rogozin 'was nominated by the Kremlin to be Sergei Glazyev's commissar, his controller.'[106] His presence guaranteed state support and reassured potential candidates

that they need not fear the Kremlin's ire. Viktor Gerashchenko, the former Central Banker, recalled that when he was invited to join the Rodina ticket, Rogozin explained that 'Glaz'ev and I are creating the 'Rodina' party, a Kremlin project, in order to take votes away from the KPRF.'[107] In practice, being a 'Kremlin project' meant financial support and access to the state media. Baburin claimed that the Kremlin had given Rodina some ten million dollars. This was disputed by a former functionary of the Presidential Administration, who insisted that 'the Kremlin does not give out money' but rather 'sends out signals to various businesses that Rodina needs to be supported financially.'[108]

Rodina's links to the security apparatus are murky. Like other loyalist projects, its election lists featured a cohort of veterans of the armed forces and the security organs. The most notable were the 1991 coup plotter and October 1993 insurgent Valentin Varennikov, the 'Black Colonel' Viktor Alksnis, the paratrooper commander Georgii Shpak, and the retired KGB general Nikolai Leonov.

Behind the scenes, Rodina drew on the expertise and connections of Valerii Vdovenko, who had served with Leonov in the KGB's First Directorate. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Vdovenko had been involved in a series of nationalist projects linked to the security apparatus. In 1990, he had been seconded to the RAU, one of the crucibles of post-Soviet Russian nationalism. By the late 1990s, he was president of MIKOR Corporation, a think tank created by KRO's Yurii Skokov. Under the aegis of MIKOR, Vdovenko worked to support the Party of Regions, a precursor of Rodina. According to Vdovenko, this project was supervised by the deputy FSB director, Vladimir Shul'ts.[109] Although this claim is difficult to verify, there is evidence that Shul'ts treated the far-right with indulgence and understanding.[110] What is clear is that Vdovenko's involvement with the Party of Regions and his chekist connections enabled him to become an important figure in the new bloc, both an insider and a power broker. Vdovenko's clout is evident in a leaked recording of his discussion in early 2006 with the political technologist Marat Gel'man about the choice of a successor to Rodina's leader, Dmitrii Rogozin.[111] Not all of his party comrades appreciated Vdovenko's efforts. Mikhail Delyagin, the prominent economist who joined Rodina in March 2004, regarded the chekist with both disdain and suspicion:

> Dmitrii Rogozin introduced me to Vdovenko. And the impressions of this acquaintance were most unpleasant. After a conversation with such a person, you want to wash your hands immediately. He seemed to be a typical operative of the old KGB, who are extremely rarely 'former.' I would never trust what this man said.[112]

Delyagin's caution was well-founded. In early 2007, while serving in the leadership of Rodina's successor organisation, Vdovenko unveiled a plan, supposedly approved by the security organs, to take control of a large segment of the radical nationalist milieu.[113] In the process, he became both an organiser and a sponsor of Severnoe Bratstvo, a neo-Nazi gang responsible for a trail of murders. Arrested in 2012, Vdovenko would be sentenced to a 2.5-year term of imprisonment under Article 282.1 of the Criminal Code for organising an 'extremist community.'[114]

Rodina's 2003 Duma campaign demonstrated the political opportunities that collaboration with the Kremlin offered to nationalists. Although the bloc was intended to weaken the communists, its leaders focused their fire on their liberal enemies. Rodina's election propaganda demonised Anatolii Chubais, a symbol of liberal reform and an architect of privatisation during the Yel'tsin era. As head of the state electricity monopoly, United Energy Systems (RAO-EES), Chubais was a key backer of the Union of Right Forces, the liberal party that united pro-Western 'young reformers.' In Rodina's campaign, Chubais became an epitome of dishonesty and corruption. Rogozin popularised the slogan 'Chubais on a [prison] plank bed' (*Chubaisa na nary!*).[115] To magnify the impact of this campaign, Rogozin and Glaz'ev proposed a Duma resolution calling on the government to dismiss Chubais from his post at RAO-EES.[116] Unwisely, Chubais took the bait and denounced Rodina as a screen for fascism. 'National-socialism in its most vile form,' he complained, 'is raising its head in the country.'[117] His fury may have discouraged some of Rodina's financial backers, but it also bolstered the bloc's credibility in nationalist circles.

To general astonishment, Rodina won 9.2% of the vote and emerged as the third major force in the State Duma. It displaced the two liberal parties: SPS and Yabloko. The effect was a reconfiguration of systemic politics. While the liberal parties had served as a brake on authoritarianism, Rodina generated pressure for more authoritarian controls. While the liberal parties had defended tolerance, human rights, and democratic institutions, Rodina became a platform for anti-Semitism, ethnonationalism, and criticism of international human rights norms.

The resulting reorientation of state policy was exemplified by the controversy over the A.D. Sakharov Museum and Public Center, an institution that was important both as a symbol of the dissident legacy and as a platform for civil society. On January 2003, the centre was visited by a band of Russian Orthodox militants, who proceeded to vandalise supposedly blasphemous artworks at an exhibition titled 'Attention, Religion!' The attackers were linked to the Committee for the Rebirth of the Fatherland, headed by the Orthodox priest Aleksandr Shargunov.[118] In response, the Prosecutor's Office charged two of the perpetrators with hooliganism.[119] The move was criticised by Aleksandr Chuev, the deputy chair of the Duma's Committee on Public Organisations and Religious Associations, who drafted a resolution demanding that the Prosecutor General lay charges against the exhibition organisers.[120] By the summer, the case had become a cause celebre for Russian nationalists. A thousand-strong crowd, including militants of Barkashov's RNE, attended the opening of the case against the two vandals, who were promptly exonerated by a sympathetic judge.[121] Despite this victory, Chuev's call for charges against the Sakharov Museum fell on deaf ears. Only in December 2003, in the wake of Chuev's re-election as part of the powerful Rodina bloc, did the authorities take action. Both the museum's director, Yurii Samodurov, and the exhibition curator, Lyudmila Vaselovskaya, were charged under the 'anti-extremism' Article 282 of the Criminal Code with 'the incitement of national, racial or religious hatred, entailing the use of an official position.'[122] After a protracted legal process, a court imposed heavy fines on both defendants in March 2005.[123]

Rodina soon split on the issue of loyalty to the Kremlin. While Rogozin boasted that the bloc was the president's 'Spetsnaz' (a team of elite 'special assignment' troops), Glaz'ev tried to capitalise on its success in the Duma election by running in the March 2004 presidential election.[124] This disrupted Rogozin's plan to nominate the former central banker, Viktor Gerashchenko, an elderly pensioner who posed no threat to the president. Rogozin made no secret of the fact that Gerashchenko's candidacy was intended to help Putin. In television debates, Gerashchenko would serve as a 'collective Putin,' a substitute for the absent president.[125] This imposture was thwarted by the Electoral Commission, which invalidated Gerashchenko's candidacy on a technicality. Rogozin was more successful in wresting control of the party brand. In February 2004, Rogozin re-registered his Party of Regions as the Rodina party. Furious, Glaz'ev likened Rogozin both to a political cuckoo taking over another's nest, and to Judas Iscariot. According to Glaz'ev, Rogozin, along with Skokov, 'had sold the "Rodina" brand to the regime for 30 pieces of silver.'[126]

Despite his collaboration with the Kremlin, Rogozin had achieved a historic victory. By bringing a cohort of Russian nationalist militants into the Duma, he had shifted the lines of political debate. As deputies, these militants had a claim to public attention that they had lacked as private citizens. In May 2004, they acquired a media platform on 'Our Strategy,' a current affairs show on St. Petersburg's TV-3 hosted by the far-right activist Mikhail Shiryaev. Two Rodina deputies, Sergei Baburin and Andrei Savel'ev, appeared as 'experts' on the first programme, which drew an anti-Semitic parallel between the holocaust and the anti-Russian 'genocide' purportedly unleashed by Jewish Bolsheviks after 1917.[127]

In early 2005, deputies from Rodina instigated a new anti-Semitic controversy. Aleksandr Krutov, one of the bloc's most prominent ideologues, composed the 'Letter of 500,' an inflammatory petition to the Prosecutor General, which called for the prosecution of Jewish organisations under the anti-extremism legislation that was normally used against Russian nationalists. As evidence of Jewish extremism, Krutov cited anti-gentile utterances from the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, a recently republished collection of excerpts from the Talmud.[128] Signed by at least 11 Rodina deputies, the petition was never criticised by Rodina's leadership. In response to a rebuke from Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar, Rogozin was neither apologetic nor conciliatory. While Rogozin noted that Rodina's presidium had recommended the withdrawal of the letter, he challenged the rabbi to explain publicly why Kitzur Shulchan Aruch was not extremist.[129]

Rodina also played a prominent role in the crackdown on civil society. In his annual address to the Duma in May 2004, President Putin had accused human rights NGOs of failing to defend the ordinary citizen because of their dependence upon grants from foreign foundations. Responding to this signal, Rodina launched a war of attrition against Russia's beleaguered human rights sector. In a series of a round-tables, conferences, and statements, Rodina deputies like Nataliya Narochnitskaya and Nikolai Leonov impugned the integrity of liberal rights-defenders and popularised a cultural relativist critique of human rights as a product of a Western culture and an instrument of Western power. This campaign led to Narochnitskaya's appointment as head of a Duma commission on human

rights and her participation in the drafting of draconian legislation regulating civil society. It also contributed to the adoption of the Declaration of the Rights and Dignity of the Human Being; a manifesto adopted by the Moscow Patriarchate's All-Russian National Sobor as an answer from Russian Orthodox civilisation to the 'Western' Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[130]

Conclusion

By the time of Putin's re-election to a second presidential term, the foundations of his version of managed nationalism had been laid. In some ways, this edifice replicated the blueprint of his predecessor. In the arena of party politics, Rodina in 2003, like KRO in 1995, was promoted by the Kremlin as a weapon against red-brown elements. The difference was that Rodina was allowed to become a major force in the parliament, while KRO never broke the 5% barrier. Rodina's success exemplified the anti-liberal function of Putin's managed nationalism. By displacing Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces, it ended the presence of liberal parties in parliamentary politics. This shift had profound consequences. Liberal deputies had been vocal critics of the Kremlin's assault on democratic institutions. Their nationalist successors became cheerleaders of authoritarianism.

No less important were the developing ties between Kremlin-sponsored structures and the far-right youth milieu. Idushchie Vmeste's enlistment of skinheads may have been a fiasco, but it shaped the development of managed nationalism. On the one hand, it demonstrated the possibility of outsourcing violence to non-state actors. When the regime confronted the threat of 'coloured revolution' in 2005, the tactics pioneered by Idushchie Vmeste would be taken up by its successor organisation, Nashi. On the other hand, Idushchie Vmeste brought figures from the football gang subculture like Aleksei Mitryushin into the constellation of Kremlin-aligned structures. These figures became intermediaries between the regime and their friends in the far-right scene. They helped to create a network stretching from skinhead gangs to the Presidential Administration. Ultimately they became 'curators' entrusted with the supervision of Russkii Obraz.

Notes

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2 The rise of a groupuscule

> We claim that the future of our country will depend upon us and like-minded people.
>
> – Editorial, *Russkii Obraz* journal, issue 2[1]

Russkii Obraz was destined to become a classic example of the perils of collaboration between the authorities and ultra-nationalists. In 2008–9, it acquired a commanding position in the nationalist milieu thanks to its cooperation with leading activists of pro-Kremlin youth organisations. But Russkii Obraz was not always a partner of the regime. In 2003–4, the organisation coalesced as a friendship group of young ultranationalist intellectuals, who were then taking the first steps of their adult lives and their professional careers. Connected by the internet, by common interests, and by shared neo-Nazi convictions, this friendship group became the core of Russkii Obraz, a group of activists who worked out the basic tenets of its ideology and the guiding principles of its development.

In many ways, Russkii Obraz epitomised what Roger Griffin has conceptualised as the 'groupuscular right.' In a seminal essay, Griffin argued that this phenomenon was a product of the post-Second World War era. It was then that the far-right mass movements of the interwar decades gave way to 'groupuscules,' tiny metapolitical entities that preserved the fascist commitment to a regenerative ('palingenetic') national revolution.[2] In the twenty-first century, these groupuscules had two defining characteristics. On the one hand, they renounced the idea of creating a mass following. On the other, they relied upon the internet to set out ideological principles and build linkages with like-minded groups.[3] The political potency of any individual groupuscule lay not in its vertical hierarchy but in its capacity to mobilise horizontal networks around a common cause.

Russkii Obraz's status as a 'groupuscule' functioning within the broader landscape of the 'groupuscular right' is crucial for understanding its role in the politics of 'managed nationalism.' Unlike the pro-Kremlin youth organisations fabricated by political technologists, Russkii Obraz was much more than a public relations project. It had a self-reliant leadership group, a cadre of ideologically committed sympathisers, deep involvement in nationalist politics, and myriad connections to diverse subcultures. This meant that Russkii Obraz had something to offer its Kremlin curators. It could mobilise genuine militants, who were much more useful to the regime than the crowds of passive, indifferent youth who dominated the

rallies of Nashi and other pro-Kremlin youth organisations. But Russkii Obraz's presence in the groupuscular right was also problematic. Even when its militants appeared to be serving the Presidential Administration, they were under constant pressure from their own subcultural milieu.

This chapter examines the genesis of Russkii Obraz as a groupuscule and its development during Putin's first term. It shows how Russkii Obraz was shaped by two nationalist mobilisations of the late 1990s: the neo-Nazi subculture, which revolved around violent skinhead gangs and the far-right music scene; and the protest campaign against NATO's bombing campaign against Serbia. These mobilisations left their mark on Nikita Tikhonov and Il'ya Goryachev and Nikita Tikhonov, the founders of Russkii Obraz. On the one hand, ideas derived from the neo-Nazi subculture, including race, degeneration, and revolutionary violence, became guiding obsessions of Russkii Obraz journal, which Goryachev and Tikhonov launched in 2003. On the other, engagement with Serbian nationalists provided Russkii Obraz with a brand, a developmental model, and a claim to expertise on the fate of a people that remained a focus of Russian nationalist emotion. Despite the youth and inexperience of its editors, the new journal quickly acquired a reputation as a respectable and serious intellectual platform for the far-right.

Il'ya Goryachev

The origins of Russkii Obraz can be traced to the fateful meeting of two undergraduate history students, Il'ya Goryachev and Nikita Tikhonov, at Moscow's Historical Library in the summer of 2002.[4] It is easy to understand how their first conversations resulted in a deep friendship. Both were engaged in ideologically charged research under the guidance of nationalist academics. Both were adherents of ultranationalist ideas. Both were involved in the neo-Nazi musical subculture.

Despite their shared interests, Goryachev and Tikhonov were very different. Tikhonov was a pagan; Goryachev professed to be a Russian Orthodox Christian. While Tikhonov was a hardened street fighter, Goryachev struck many observers as incongruously diminutive and effete. In ultranationalist circles, Goryachev was known by the innocuous nickname of 'Student.' Mark Feigin, the lawyer who defended Goryachev at his 2015 trial, described his client as 'not at all the masculine type' that predominated in radical nationalist ranks. Moreover, he was 'extremely far from any kind of physical activity.'[5] Natal'ya Yudina, one of SOVA Center's leading experts on the ultranationalist scene, likened Goryachev's demeanour to that of a Komsomol functionary.[6] In a similar vein, he was described in a document circulated by his opponents as 'a plump young man, a typical office worker,' who was 'not gifted with broad shoulders, but is capable of potent political combinations.'[7]

This talent enabled Goryachev to become the mastermind of Russkii Obraz, conceiving its projects, crafting its propaganda, and enticing talented nationalists into its inner circle.[8] Many colleagues acknowledged his powers of persuasion. Aleksei Mikhailov, who led Russkii Obraz in 2010–12, claimed that Goryachev 'could unite completely different people, many of whom were older and more

experienced than him.'[9] In similar terms, Tikhonov would testify in court that 'I always admired [Goryachev's] ability to get along with people, to find a common language both with state structures and with youth nationalist groupings.'[10]

Goryachev's identification with Orthodox Christianity was nurtured by his childhood in a family of the creative intelligentsia. His mother, Natal'ya Nikiforova, was a poet and an active participant in the Moscow literary scene. She served as secretary of the Russian Literary Club, an organisation that hosted a well-known poetry website (www.stihi.ru). Her efforts as an organiser of poetry readings and a literary salon earned her a public statement of gratitude from the House of Romanov.[11] Her blog included regular references to Russian Orthodox festivals.[12] After her son's imprisonment, she would declare that she entirely shared his right-conservative views, adding that 'I am against same-sex marriage.'[13]

A formative moment for Goryachev was the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, which became a rallying point for Russian nationalists in the late 1990s. According to his mother, 'like all young boys, he was interested in the war.' His final years of high school coincided with the intensifying conflict in Kosovo that culminated in NATO's bombing campaign against Serbia in the spring of 1999. 'He sympathised with the Serbs, who were being bombed,' she recalled.[14] In fact, Goryachev identified with the most violent elements amongst Serbian radical nationalists. On several internet discussion forums, Goryachev adopted the alias of 'Arkan,' the nom-de-guerre of the Serbian gangster, paramilitary leader, and indicted war criminal, Željko Ražnatović, who was gunned down in central Belgrade in 2000.[15] At the same time, Goryachev wrote an essay about the history of the Serbian Orthodox Church, which earned him a diploma that was presented by Patriarch Aleksei II at Easter 2002 at Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius.[16] That year, Goryachev began his journalistic career as a contributor to *NG-religiya*, a supplement on religious issues to the newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*.[17]

Goryachev's interests in religion and the Yugoslav conflict found expression in his graduation thesis, which examined the plight of the Orthodox Church during the Second World War under Croatia's genocidal Ustaša regime.[18] His supervisor was Elena Gus'kova, an academic fellow traveller of Serbian radical nationalism, who had a penchant for recycling Serbian nationalist mythology in her public comments.[19] During NATO's bombing campaign against Serbia in 1999, Gus'kova had advised hard-line elements in the Russian military establishment. Amongst those grateful for her insights was General Leonid Ivashov, the instigator of the 'Dash to Pristina' by Russian peacekeepers.[20] While supervising Goryachev's research in 2003, Gus'kova appeared as an expert witness for the defence at the trial of a Bosnian Serb general, Stanislav Galić, before the International Criminal Tribunal on the former Yugoslavia. The prosecutor demolished the tendentious and unprofessional report that she had prepared.[21] Galić was convicted of war crimes for his use of terror against civilians during the siege of Sarajevo.[22] This humiliation can only have aggravated Gus'kova's hostility towards the ICTY, which she repeatedly denounced as a political instrument for the punishment of the Serbian people.[23]

There was clearly an ideological affinity between Goryachev and his supervisor. According to Gus'kova, her first meeting with Goryachev 'left a very

favourable impression.' To her, he appeared to be 'a very serious student, who knew what he wanted.' Nearly a decade later, when Goryachev was awaiting trial for murder and other charges, she would reminiscence about his 'brilliant' defence of his diploma thesis, which she extolled as one of the best of his cohort. This success secured his admission to postgraduate study. Gus'kova supervised the first year of Goryachev's research for a candidate's thesis on the same subject as his graduation thesis. In 2005, however, he informed her that he was dropping out because of 'serious problems in his personal life.'[24] By then, he was already making a living as a journalist and building a reputation in far-right circles.

Nikita Tikhonov

If Il'ya Goryachev was a studious intellectual, Nikita Tikhonov was made of a very different mettle. The son of a career intelligence officer, Tikhonov studied in the history faculty of Moscow State University, but he was also a hardened street fighter. As a teenager, he had joined Moscow's football gang subculture, which overlapped with the burgeoning neo-Nazi skinhead milieu. In these circles, Tikhonov appears to have won respect for his prowess as a combatant and for his commitment to the skinhead ethos. In 1996, aged 16, he had been badly beaten in a brawl with an overt 'Hitlerite' from a rival gang. Shocked at his injuries, Tikhonov's father shouted that he would track down the assailants. But he was dissuaded by his son. Adhering to the code of his subculture, the young Tikhonov insisted that the security organs could not be used to settle scores between skinheads.[25]

One sign of Tikhonov's status in skinhead circles was his membership of 'United Brigades 88' (Ob"edinennye brigady 88, OB-88), an elite gang of skinhead fighters that became legendary in far-right circles.[26] OB-88 had been established in 1998 by the amalgamation of two major skinhead gangs, 'Belye bul'dogy' ('White bulldogs') and 'Lefortovskii front' and an array of smaller groups.[27] It aspired to unite all of Moscow's skinheads into a potent fighting force. Nikolai Korolev, a notorious skinhead leader, recalled in his prison memoir that 'a structure is appearing that has undertaken the task of uniting the skinheads of the world.'[28] The 'best lads' were invited to join OB-88, while their home brigades retained their freedom of action. Not every skinhead gang accepted the invitation. Both Blood & Honour/Combat 18 and Nikolai Korolev's group declined because they were oriented towards the 'white power' ideology of European skinheads, rather than 'national socialism.'[29] Nevertheless, OB-88 quickly became one of the most powerful formations in the skinhead gang subculture that had crystallised in the late 1990s. Within a year, it was able to summon hundreds of fighters to join its attacks on immigrant targets.[30]

Despite its violence, OB-88 appeared to enjoy a kind of impunity. It had a significant public presence, including an internet page and its own journal.[31] While the security forces arrested Eduard Limonov and leading activists of the National Bolshevik Party in April 2001, they appeared to ignore the far more lethal conduct of OB-88. One explanation for this selective justice is the danger of confronting violent skinheads. Another is OB-88's links to Idushchie Vmeste, the Putin regime's first attempt to create a loyalist youth organisation. As we saw in

Chapter 1, there is evidence that OB-88's bloodiest foray, its attack on Moscow's Tsaritsyno market on 30 October 2001, was conducted by fighters who had originally been assembled on the instructions of Idushchie Vmeste to disperse an expected gathering of anti-globalisation militants. This rampage left two dead and twenty injured. The resulting media coverage and public controversy helped to produce a crackdown that resulted in the trial and conviction of the group's leader, Mikhail Volkov, in November 2002.[32]

Tikhonov missed the carnage at Tsaritsyno and the ensuing police roundup because he had been injured in a clash with members of a rival football gang the previous night.[33] In the aftermath of Volkov's trial, OB-88 was officially disbanded, but some experts were not reassured by reports of its demise. One of the most attentive observers of the neo-Nazi scene, Aleksandr Tarasov, noted at the time that members of the skinhead subculture responded to queries about OB-88 with the information that 'the Brigades no longer exists … they have dissolved itself.' According to Tarasov, 'in reality the core of OB-88 has gone underground.' Most likely, he suggested, OB-88 were no longer skinheads and had become a 'microscropic ultra-right sect' engrossed in far-right literature.[34] In fact, veterans of OB-88 would soon resurface in the public arena. One of its leaders, Sergei Nikulkin ('Sergei Sergeevich'), a close comrade of Tikhonov, was destined to play an important role in the pro-Kremlin youth organisation Mestnye ('Locals').[35] Other members of OB-88 would become the core of BORN, the terrorist group led by Tikhonov in 2008–9.

While Volkov was awaiting trial, Tikhonov was hard at work on his graduation thesis on 'Chechen Separatism (1990–1)' at Moscow State University.[36] His supervisor was Professor A.I. Vdovin, a historian renowned in nationalist circles. Vdovin's reputation had encouraged Aleksandr Sevast'yanov, the ultranationalist ideologue, to try to recruit him as a commentator for *Natsional'naya Gazeta*, the mouthpiece of the Natsional'naya Derzhavnaya Partiya Rossii (National Great Power Party of Russia). According to Tikhonov, Vdovin had declined the invitation, 'explaining that a scholarly researcher must avoid sharp political passions, preserving his scientific detachment.'[37] The limits of this detachment were exposed in 2010, when Vdovin was embroiled in a controversy over a co-authored textbook, which advanced inflammatory claims about Chechen collaboration with Nazism and vindicated Stalin's anti-cosmopolitan campaign as a patriotic act.[38]

Like Goryachev, Tikhonov found employment as a journalist after graduation. But he remained active in the neo-Nazi underground. Dmitrii Steshin, a prominent journalist and a member of Russkii Obraz's inner circle, testified that 'Tikhonov enjoyed authority amongst Russian nationalists, had the attributes of a leader' and 'was a good "fighter," which is valued amongst them.' He recalled an occasion when they were walking together in Moscow and encountered a drunken man harassing an old woman. Tikhonov 'felled the man with a single blow.'[39] This readiness to engage in street violence was to end Tikhonov's journalistic career. On 16 April 2006, Tikhonov was part of a gang of five neo-Nazi militants, including two fellow veterans of OB-88, who ambushed a group of youths near a stadium where an Antifa rock group was due to perform. One of victims, a 19-year-old student named Aleksandr Ryukhin, was fatally stabbed.[40] Implicated by one of his

accomplices as the murderer, Tikhonov went into hiding. This was his first step on a path that would lead to the creation of the terrorist group, BORN.

Kolovrat

Tikhonov and Goryachev were both shaped by the far-right subculture of the late 1990s and early 2000s. One of the central nodes of this subculture was the rock band *Kolovrat*, which dominated Russia's skinhead music scene. The band's name referred to the Slavic symbol of the sun wheel, an eight-hooked circle that resembled a double swastika. It also alluded to Evpatii Kolovrat, a warrior killed in battle against the Mongol invaders who devastated Russia in the thirteenth century. Despite these concessions to national traditions, *Kolovrat* openly propagandised neo-Nazi ideas and symbols. Its website displayed images of skinheads performing raised-arm salutes.[41] Its lyrics combined neo-Nazi motifs and the celebration of racial violence. One of the band's most notorious songs, 'Heroes of the ROA,' paid homage to Slavic Vlasovites who 'fought in the ranks of the SS for the purity of Aryan blood.'[42] For many years, *Kolovrat* existed on the margins of legality. Most of its performances took place behind closed doors in private venues for skinhead and football gang audiences. Its attempts to hold public concerts were often banned or broken up by the police.[43]

The focal point of *Kolovrat*'s network was 'Kolovrat Crew,' a group of dedicated fans who provided support for the band's activities. The exact relationship between Kolovrat Crew and Russkii Obraz is unclear, but the band clearly played an important role in the coalescence of a friendship group and in its political education. Nikita Tikhonov served in the band's security team. In a conversation recorded by the FSB, he recalled: 'Were it not for [*Kolovrat*'s] music, the movement would not exist, I would not exist … I considered it an honour to stand near their stage as a guard.'[44] Goryachev's links to Kolovrat Crew are less clear. According to the journalist and anti-fascist activist Aleksandr Litoi, who began to monitor neo-Nazi websites after he had been ambushed by skinheads, Goryachev worked for the band's PR team. Litoi claims to have identified Goryachev as a moderator of the discussion forum on the band's website, where he participated as one of two users named 'Arkan' – one named 'Arkan-14' and the other 'Arkan moderator.'[45]

There is no doubt that this site played an important role in the coalescence of Russia's neo-Nazi subculture. According to Litoi, 'it quickly became clear that the central resource was the guest book of the group Kolovrat.'[46] This conclusion accords with the boasts about the website made by anonymous members of Kolovrat Crew in a 2002 interview. In response to a question about the website's contribution to the propaganda of rightist ideology, 'K' boasted that it 'had grown into one of the most popular NS [national-socialist] websites on runet.' This judgement was seconded by 'A', who described Kolovrat's website as 'one of the central internet resources for those who share the aims of NS.' The abundance of additional materials on the website 'permits young co-fighters to widen their horizons, to learn many new things and to avoid many mistakes.' He added that the real centre of the website was its guestbook, which had become a meeting place for national socialists 'from every corner of the world.'[47]

No less important were the networking opportunities offered by Kolovrat's concerts. Kolovrat Crew organised the band's tours around provincial Russia and travelled in its entourage as a support team. During the leadup to a concert, they had to work closely with local militant leaders on advertising, on the venue, on accommodation, on the distribution of proceeds, and on security. The links forged by this collaboration were reinforced by the shared experience of the concert and the discussions that accompanied it. For both its media experts and its security team, Kolovrat Crew was an opportunity to develop a national web of contacts in far-right circles.[48] These informal contacts were a vital asset both for aspiring far-right politicians and for those who embarked on the path of political violence. It was at a *Kolovrat* concert in 2003 that Nikita Tikhonov met Oleg Golubev, the leader of the Russian version of the skinhead gang Blood and Honour/Combat 18 and a leading proponent of armed struggle.[49]

A different kind of impetus was provided to Russkii Obraz by the suspension of Kolovrat's activities in 2004. The band's lead singer, Denis Gerasimov, was detained at Prague airport and charged with inciting racial hatred at a concert of neo-Nazi bands in the small Czech town of Chroustovice.[50] Facing a possible five-year prison term, Gerasimov claimed to be engaged in a purely artistic venture. To bolster that pretence and to reduce the volume of incriminating evidence available to the prosecution, his supporters deleted countless webpages associated with the band, including those of Kolovrat Crew.[51] Left with time on their hands, some veterans of Kolovrat Crew found a new outlet in Russkii Obraz. According to the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, 'the backbone of the Crew flowed into a new crowd, which received the name Russkii Obraz.'[52] The connection was underlined by Russkii Obraz's own reports of its early ventures, which referred to its adherents as 'Rus Obraz Crew.'[53]

The histories of Russkii Obraz and Kolovrat remained intertwined. Recordings of Kolovrat songs were played at many of Russkii Obraz's public events. One of the favourites was 'Kosovo Front,' which was broadcast at Russkii Obraz's joint demonstration with pro-Kremlin youth organisations protesting against the arrest of the Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzić.[54] Kolovrat songs also occupied a prominent place in the soundtrack to *Russkoe Soprotivlenie* ('Russian Resistance'), a documentary film produced by Russkii Obraz in support of the neo-Nazi underground in the summer of 2009. The crowning triumph of Russkii Obraz's involvement in 'managed nationalism' was an officially-authorised concert by Kolovrat in Moscow's Bolotnaya's Square, 'within a cannon shot of the Kremlin,' on 4 November 2009. This breakthrough, which was made possible by Il'ya Goryachev's negotiations with the Presidential Administration, testified not only to the Kolovrat's importance to Russian radical nationalists but also to its enduring connection to Russkii Obraz.

National Bolshevism

Another formative influence on Russia Obraz was the Natsional-Bolshevistkaya Partiya (National Bolshevik Party, NBP), which was established by Eduard Limonov and Aleksandr Dugin in 1994. For many far-right militants, the NBP

was a first port of call. What made it attractive was its inflammatory slogans, its penchant for fascist symbolism, and the vigour of the youth subculture that surrounded it. Dmitrii Taratorin, who became Russkii Obraz's principal ideologist, moved in NBP circles during the 1990s and was close to both Limonov and Dugin.[55] A similar trajectory was followed by Aleksandr Matyushin, a former NBP militant who became the head of Russkii Obraz's branch in Donetsk and played a prominent role as an agitator and a field commander in the Russian Spring.[56] Others were influenced by the NBP's newspaper *Limonka*, whose irony and intellectual sophistication contrasted with the worn clichés and turgid invective of its rivals. One avid reader of *Limonka* was Nikita Tikhonov. Another was his friend Sergei Erzunov, who was to become the lead singer in Russkii Obraz's official band. The two discussed the political actions described in its pages 'and in general shared [the NBP's] views.'[57]

The NBP influenced Russkii Obraz in three ways. The first was the linkage of politics and culture. Both organisations were youth movements that were engaged in musical and publishing ventures. From its inception, the NBP enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with punk bands like Egor Letov's *Grazhdanskaya Oborona* and musicians like the composer Sergei Kurekhin. Concerts in the party headquarters became both a recruiting tool and a stage for the creation of a collective identity. At the same time, the NBP reached out to intelligent youth with a newspaper that combined political commentary, ideological pronouncements, essays, poetry, and music reviews. Its pages featured discussion of thinkers as diverse as Herbert Marcuse, Guy Debord, and Carl Schmitt. What made this serious content palatable was ironic humour and an aesthetic, developed by the Slovenian band Laibach, which appeared to parody totalitarian propaganda. One of *Limonka*'s regular columns on ideological matters was titled 'Brainwashing.' The paper also issued absurd fashion instructions to the cadres and published mocking tirades, including derision of Russian men, by 'Margot Führer' (the pseudonym of Limonov's wife, the nightclub singer Nataliya Medvedeva).

The second contribution of the NBP was ideological extremism. During the 1990s, the party courted outrage with its inflammatory slogans and its unconditional rejection of the post-Soviet order. Its founding manifesto articulated a 'burning hatred for the inhuman SYSTEM of the trinity: liberalism-democracy-capitalism,' and heralded an apocalyptic revolution that would lay the foundations of a 'traditional, hierarchical society' and a Russian empire stretching from Gibraltar to Vladivostok. Flaunting its totalitarian sympathies, it promised recruits that they might follow in the footsteps of great totalitarian leaders. 'He who was nobody will become Dzerzhinskii, Goebbels, Molotov, Voroshilov, Ciano, Goering, Zhukov.'[58] Although the appeal to the Stalinist heritage was unexceptional in post-Soviet Russia, the NBP's cult of the Third Reich was scandalous. The NBP borrowed the term Gauleiter, the Nazi party's title for the leader of regional party branches. The NBP's Moscow headquarters was the Bunker, an allusion to Hitler's bomb shelter in the final months of the Second World War. *Limonka* was littered with quotations from Hitler and Goebbels, and reflections on the history of the Nazi party and the Third Reich.[59] No less provocative was *Limonka*'s treatment of 'fascism' as a positive

term, its efforts to popularise the ideas of fascist thinkers, and its denunciations of anti-fascist activists and initiatives.[60]

The third way that the NBP influenced Russkii Obraz was the valorisation of terrorism. During the 1990s, *Limonka* featured numerous articles about the lives and exploits of famous terrorists, ranging from the Red Brigades and the Baader-Meinhof gang to Che Guevara and Osama bin Laden.[61] This preoccupation was justified by Limonov in an inflammatory editorial, which proclaimed that 'terrorism is inevitable in Russia' and that 'the country is thirsting for civil war.'[62] While Limonov claimed to be dismayed by this development, *Limonka* offered positive coverage of terrorist acts as models for emulation. The assassination of Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin by a Jewish extremist provided a pretext for ironic criticism of anti-Semitic prejudices: 'this attack alone shows the contrary – that [Jews] are more heroic than contemporary Russians. Shame on us.'[63] *Limonka* also vilified the targets of terrorist acts as criminals who deserved to be killed.[64]

Russkii Obraz's incorporation of these aspects of National Bolshevism into its own project was facilitated by the NBP's evolution under Putin. The party's obsession with fascism faded after the departure of Dugin in 1998 and the formulation of an anti-authoritarian 'minimum programme.'[65] Its incitements to terror were abandoned after its militants developed a repertoire of non-violent forms of direct action, such as 'food ambushes' on public figures and occupations of public buildings. This de-radicalisation enabled Limonov to forge a coalition with anti-Putin liberals and to embrace the language of human rights and the legacy of liberal dissidents like Andrei Sakharov. In the process, he alienated ultra-nationalists within NBP ranks and left a vacant niche in the far-right youth subculture. Russkii Obraz was one of the forces that tried to fill it.

The Serbian source

The coalescence of the inner circle of Russkii Obraz took place on an internet forum dedicated to the discussion of military history. Launched in January 2002, vojnik.borda.ru was moderated by Il'ya Goryachev under the username 'Arkan.'[66] It was here that he first came into contact with Nikita Tikhonov. In a celebratory statement seven years later, Goryachev would identify the online chat in 2002 as the moment when Russkii Obraz took shape as a community.[67] One thread of vojnik.borda.ru that has survived records a discussion later that year, which features lurid conspiracy theories about Israel's alleged involvement in the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, D.C.[68] The central topic of discussion, however, was the recent conflict in the Balkans. Goryachev, who had recently begun to specialise on the history of Yugoslavia, evidently hoped to use the site to attract fellow enthusiasts as contributors to a journal. He even registered the name *Ratnik* as a publication.[69]

This project was sidelined in 2002, when Goryachev and Tikhonov travelled to Serbia. In Belgrade they made contact with militants of Otačastveni Pokret Obraz ('Fatherland Movement Dignity'), a far-right organisation that became a model

for their own political project.[70] The Serbian Obraz had been launched as an 'Orthodox-patriotic' journal in 1993 by the sociologist Nebojša Krstić.[71] In 1999, this intellectual venture was expanded into a political movement, which was reputedly based in Belgrade University's Philosophy Faculty.[72] Although ostensibly dedicated to Christian values, Obraz was illiberal and rabidly anti-Semitic. Krstić lambasted democracy as 'an anti-Christian political ideology, which annihilates the spiritual and great power identities of sovereign Christian nations.' His own credo was shaped by the ideas of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović (1881–1956), the anti-Semitic cleric who was a major influence on Serbian populism. In 1945, Velimirović had declared that 'all modern ideas including democracy, and strikes, and socialism, and atheism, and religious tolerance, and pacifism, and global revolution, and capitalism, and communism' were inventions of 'Jews, or rather their father, the Devil.'[73]

Obraz attracted little attention until the anti-Milošević revolution of October 2000, a democratic breakthrough that shattered its most cherished assumptions about Serbia's illiberal destiny. One month later, a group of Obraz activists announced their rejection of the new order by disrupting a session of the Serbian Writers' Union, where liberals were challenging the nationalist old guard.[74] The targets of Obraz's militancy were identified on its website in 'A Message to Serbia's Enemies.' The list was headed by 'Zionist–Jewish racists' and 'Judeo–Masonic murderers,' whom Obraz blamed for NATO's bombing campaign.[75] Other enemies included Croatians, Slavic Muslims, Albanians, democrats, pacifists, drug addicts, and homosexuals. Obraz's militants found an outlet for their hatred in the summer of 2001, when they played a leading role in violent clashes at Belgrade's first Gay Pride march. Seven policemen were injured.[76] Despite Krstić's death in a car crash later that year, Obraz remained a conspicuous presence in Serbian street politics under his successor, Mladen Obradović. In April 2002, shortly before Goryachev and Tikhonov's visit to Belgrade, Obradović organised a campaign in support of the indicted war criminal, Radovan Karadzić, plastering the city with posters emblazoned with the slogan, 'All Serbs are Radovan.'[77]

Goryachev was clearly impressed by his encounters with Obraz. He sensed the superior potential of the Serbian 'brand' and its broader format over his original plan for a niche journal.[78] In at least four ways, Russkii Obraz bore the traces of its Serbian prototype. First, its name and its symbol (the Constantine Cross) copied those of Obraz. Second, Russkii Obraz replicated Obraz's ideological synthesis, which combined Orthodox Christian conservatism and virulent racist nationalism. Third, Serbian themes, particularly the struggle over Kosovo and the fate of Serbian war criminals, were to become an abiding preoccupation of Russkii Obraz. And fourth, Russkii Obraz followed Obraz's developmental path, beginning as an editorial collective and evolving into a political movement.

The journal

In February 2003, Goryachev and Tikhonov unveiled the first issue of a journal called *Russkii Obraz*, which appeared in a small print-run of 500 copies.[79] Clearly

addressed to a far-right readership, it featured articles about corporate brainwashing, US right-wing militias, the diasporas of Russian Old Believers, and the evils of national autonomy for Russia's minorities.[80] A second issue, on the Russian Caucasus, was released in 2004. Each subsequent issue had a thematic focus: the Russian Village (No.3); Islam (No.4); the System (No.5); Football Fans (No.6); Conception (No.7); and the Russian Image of the Future (No.8).[81]

At the outset, *Russkii Obraz* possessed an aura of the underground. Its early issues offered no information about the identity of its editors. Only in issue 4 did readers finally learn that Il'ya Goryachev was editor, that Nikita Tikhonov was managing editor (*shef-redactor*), and that the editorial committee included the journalist Dmitrii Steshin, Sasha Savinovich (from Banja Luka in Bosnia-Hercegovina), and Aleksandr Miladinovich (a resident of Frankfurt).[82] At about this time, Goryachev and Tikhonov achieved official registration of *Russkii Obraz* as a monthly national publication.[83] In fact, only six issues appeared by 2006, when Tikhonov went into hiding to avoid arrest. Two more issues came out during 2008–9, as Russkii Obraz rose to prominence as a public movement.

For the young university students who produced it, the journal posed multiple challenges. An editorial in issue two admitted that no one on the editorial team had prior experience of the publishing industry. They 'had to learn a lot on the job,' and they 'relied more on enthusiasm than professionalism.'[84] Nor did have they have office space for editorial premises. According to one source, the editorial committee never held formal meetings but made editorial decisions in email correspondence.[85] Another problem was distribution, which was managed by the editors. On one occasion, Goryachev arranged for his mother to travel to Zelenograd to pay cash for a new issue and collect the print-run from printers. No other member of the editorial committee had access to a car. The exercise was a fiasco. The print-run had been delayed and local police stopped Goryachev's mother over a minor traffic violation. To avoid the confiscation of her licence, she handed over the money intended for the printers.[86]

The editors' inexperience was matched by their ambition. 'We claim that the future of our country will depend upon us and like-minded people,' boasted an editorial in the second issue.[87] To bolster their credibility, the editors avoided the amateurish production standards that were hallmarks of the ultranationalist press. 'In working out the journal's ideology,' Goryachev explained to his interrogator in 2009, 'Nikita Tikhonov and I always maintained that a right-wing nationalist publication must meet the criteria of the normal mass media, that is, it must look like a normal glossy magazine.'[88] What made these aspirations plausible was the fact that the editorial committee was dominated by media professionals.[89] The most prominent was Dmitrii Steshin, who was already a celebrated war correspondent for *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*. A host of other members found employment in serious media outlets. Both Il'ya Goryachev and Nikita Tikhonov wrote for *RE:aktsiya*, a tabloid aimed at a youth market. When it became the platform of a public movement, the journal was joined by Dmitrii Taratorin, who had reported on youth politics for the liberal newspaper *Novye Izvestiya*.

To a superficial reader, *Russkii Obraz* projected an image of intelligent, pragmatic patriotism. In editorials, it condemned terrorism and other forms of

'unparliamentary' struggle as 'not only ineffective but harmful!'[90] It advocated self-organisation and national solidarity as remedies for the ills of Russian society.[91] Its content was often erudite and sophisticated. 'In order to understand articles in *RO*,' boasted an editorial, 'it is essential to have a knowledge of world history, to have a grasp of sociology, economics, and related fields.'[92] The journal's pages were littered with references to Carl Jung, Max Weber, Michel Houellebecq and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Readers were offered analysis and informed commentary on important social questions such as demographic decline, the plight of the Russian village, and the place of Islam in Russian society.[93]

However, this sophistication and apparent moderation cloaked a radical message. From its inception, *Russkii Obraz* was the crucible of neo-fascist ideological project that revolved around three fixations. The first was national degeneration, which Roger Griffin has identified as a central component of the mobilising myths of fascist movements.[94] This degeneration was a kind of moral malaise, an affliction of a liberal order that dissolved society into atomised individuals, hedonistic and egotistic, lacking convictions and a sense of roots, ancestors, and history. The principal task of Russian nationalists, affirmed Nikita Tikhonov in a response to a reader, was 'the struggle against the *obydlivanie* of the Russian people.' Literally, '*obydlivanie*' means 'transformation into farm animals.' In colloquial usage, it connotes a loss of will and a state of abject dependence. 'We want to change the behavioural stereotypes of the Russian person,' continued Tikhonov, 'so that he doesn't excrete on the staircases of apartment buildings, so that he stops imitating criminals, so that he can and wants to assert his rights.'[95] To achieve this transformation, *Russkii Obraz* spared neither the downtrodden nor the privileged. It poured scorn on the fashion sense and moral vacuity of the '*patsany*,' the hoodlums who inhabited the criminal underworld of Russian cities.[96] It also lashed out at the affluent 'yuppies,' whom it depicted as dehumanised and denationalised cogs in the corporate machine.[97] Special opprobrium was reserved for the post-Soviet generation of selfish, consumerist young people who had renounced child-bearing because they live 'exclusively for the satisfaction of their transitory desires.' Only 'an authentic cultural counter-revolution,' with vigorous propaganda to discredit the egocentrism of this generation, could rescue Russia from a demographic cataclysm.[98] Otherwise, the country's emptying spaces would be filled by a NATO army bringing 'liberation from the need to make decisions.'[99]

Russkii Obraz's second fixation was race. An early issue featured a long, sympathetic interview with Aleksandr Sevast'yanov, the ultranationalist ideologue and literary scholar who was Russia's most eminent biological racist. In his capacity as co-chairman of the Natsional'no-Derzhavnaya Partiya Rossii (NDPR), Sevast'yanov had composed a manifesto which asserted that cultural differences 'were strictly determined by the genetically conditioned structure of the psyche and body, all the way to the construction of the vocal cords and the convolutions of the brain.'[100] In his interview with *Russkii Obraz*, Sevast'yanov developed this assumption into a long-term project for the transformation of the racial makeup of the Russian people. While conceding that today anyone with at least one *russkii* (ethnic Russian) parent could claim to be *russkii*, he proposed

that the criteria should be made stricter 'for the generation of my grandchildren.' According to Sevast'yanov, 'the concept of the purity of the blood exists not merely in theory, and the ethno-genetic core of the *russkii* people is present in reality.' Russians were 'a sound (*polnotsennyi*) people, not a nation of mestizos and half-bloods, like Latin Americans.' This was a solid foundation for racial purification:

> Our task is not merely to increase the percentage of *russkii*, but to reinforce the homogeneity of the Russian people, to increase its ethno-genetic core. From generation to generation, the percentage of non-Russian blood must diminish in our people.

He added that he was extremely hostile to mixed marriages, an opinion which 'my grandchildren know very well.'[101]

Two issues later, Nikita Tikhonov promised that the journal would raise 'the racial theme' because 'the racial aspect is an important component of national identity.' Race defined the boundary between the Russian people and its adversaries. For Tikhonov, the guiding principle of a Russian nationalist was 'an understanding of the European nature of the Russian people.' In his lexicon, 'European nature' was a synonym for a 'white race' that was facing demographic annihilation. This impending catastrophe made it necessary for Russian nationalists to make common cause with their fellow white Europeans: 'now, when the white man has become an endangered species on the planet Earth, it is essential to show solidarity with people of our race.' No less important was the abandonment of the idea that Russia had an Asian or Eurasian destiny, which was promoted by 'anti-Russian elites.' This idea was nothing less than 'race treason, an insult to memory of our forefathers, and a historical dead-end.'[102]

Racism was the cornerstone of *Russkii Obraz*'s vision of Russian statehood. In a response to a letter purportedly received from a Dagestani reader, Goryachev argued in issue four that the only way to accommodate racial difference was the establishment of an apartheid-style regime:

> We are different, and it is essential to recognise this. We cannot live together. Side-by-side, yes, but not together. What is needed is *apartheid* – separate living, which presupposes separate laws, as it was in the Russian empire.[103]

Like Serbian radical nationalism, the white supremacist regime in South Africa became an abiding preoccupation for Russkii Obraz. In 2008 the principles of apartheid were enshrined in Russkii Obraz's formal programme, a blueprint for a racial dictatorship that denied basic rights to non-Russians.[104]

The third radical fixation in the pages of *Russkii Obraz* was the celebration of the perpetrators of racist violence. In a major article titled 'Hero of the Asphalt,' Aleksei Popov recounted the exploits of 'Arkan' (Željko Ražnatović), the Serbian gangster and paramilitary leader. Few rivalled Arkan's notoriety as a perpetrator of ethnic cleansing, but for *Russkii Obraz* he was an exemplary man of action. Popov's article opened with a description of the dismay of Western journalists at

the massive and diverse crowd – criminal identities, sportsmen, war veterans, and show business celebrities – who came to pay their respects at Arkan's funeral. To explain this adulation for the 'Serbian hero,' Popov recounted Arkan's diverse careers in crime, sports, and politics. Under the sub-heading, 'patriotic wars,' he glorified Arkan's paramilitary 'Tigers' as an elite force of heroic warriors, swashbuckling heroes who repeatedly saved their country from disaster. He noted that the Tigers 'participated in the taking of the Muslim enclave of Srebrenica in the summer of 1995,' without bothering to mention the genocidal massacre that ensued.[105]

Russkii Obraz paid particular attention to violent racists in the English-speaking world. A long article commended North American right-wing militias for their readiness to defend themselves with arms and their 'principled commitment to the survival of their culture and race.' The article revolved around one of the most celebrated events in the mythology of US white supremacists, the confrontation between Randy Weaver and a small army of FBI agents at Ruby Ridge in August 1992, which resulted in the deaths of Weaver's wife and son.[106] This bloodshed was one of the grievances that prompted the former US marine Timothy McVeigh to bomb the federal building in Oklahoma City three years later, killing 168 people.[107] *Russkii Obraz* also devoted a glowing review to another source of McVeigh's fury: *The Turner Diaries*, a crudely racist novel by the US neo-Nazi activist William Pierce about a 'White Revolution' that culminated in a genocide of non-Aryan 'degenerate' peoples.[108] Without a hint of disapproval, the reviewer noted that the book had inspired McVeigh's act of mass murder.[109]

An interest in the possibilities of terrorist violence also pervaded Il'ya Plekhanov's article in issue five on the French 'Secret Army Organisation' (OAS), which waged a campaign of bombings and assassinations to resist De Gaulle's withdrawal from Algeria.[110] Describing the OAS as an alliance of army officers, intelligence agents, and ultra-rightists, Plekhanov explained that 'as a method of struggle, the OAS chose individual and mass terror, and as targets of terror – liberal senators, deputies of the National Assembly, journalists, senior police and military officers, and the president himself.'[111] Four years later, the experience of the OAS would resurface as a point of reference on a blog linked to Russkii Obraz, which was already deeply implicated in a campaign of terrorist violence.[112]

Like its Serbian prototype, *Russkii Obraz* journal was a political project from the outset. Its closest ally was the new Movement against Illegal Immigration (Dvizhenie protiv nelegal'noi immigratsii, DPNI), which had been established in the summer of 2002 under the leadership of Aleksandr Belov (Potkin). The groupuscular, networked nature of both organisations enabled them to develop a symbiotic relationship. In December 2003, Goryachev and Tikhonov had worked alongside Belov in the xenophobic Duma campaign of the liberal politician Boris Fedorov. Other Russkii Obraz insiders, including its future leader Aleksei Mikhailov, played a prominent role in DPNI. Between 2003 and 2005, *Russkii Obraz* provided a platform for DPNI propaganda and official statements, which were printed without commentary. Issue two featured DPNI's founding declaration. It was accompanied by an image of a poster, which had been produced by a human rights NGO to promote tolerance of refugees. Below an image of a

Muslim woman breastfeeding her child in a column of refugees, the poster proclaimed: 'They are just like us, except that they have suffered misfortune.' Russkii Obraz's inflammatory caption was: 'Whose wife and child are these? Perhaps [those of Chechen insurgent] Arbi Baraev.'[113] Issue three included an 'Appeal' from DPNI that reviewed the movement's progress during its first year and set out ten directions for its future activity.[114] The next issue devoted three pages to a report about the threat of Chechen terrorism from the 'Analytical Department of DPNI.'[115]

No less significant was the patronage of older nationalist figures. One of the most important was Leonid Ivashov. Announcing the journal's fourth issue, a press release explained that 'behind this publication stands Leonid Ivashov, a retired general-colonel of the GRU, who for a long time headed the Defence Ministry's Main Directorate for International Military Cooperation.'[116] It is easy to understand Ivashov's sympathy for the Serbophile youths who had been inspired by their visit to Belgrade to create Russkii Obraz. During the Kosovo War, Ivashov had been the ringleader of a group of military hard-liners who had obstructed a negotiated settlement and then organised the 'Dash to Pristina,' the redeployment of Russian soldiers from Bosnia to Kosovo in advance of the arrival of NATO forces.[117] After his retirement, Ivashov became a vitriolic critic of Putin's post-September 11 rapprochement with the West. Typical of Ivashov's style was his leading article in *Russkii Obraz*'s fourth issue. Titled 'Welcome NATO,' it accused Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov of treason because of his support for a 'status of forces' agreement with the United States, which would authorise exchanges of military personnel for anti-terrorist training and exercises. Likening Ivanov both to Nazi collaborators and to boyars who had invited Poles to occupy the Kremlin in 1610, Ivashov claimed that the agreement was tantamount to an invitation 'to foreign forces to occupy his own country.'[118]

When its fifth issue appeared in March 2005, *Russkii Obraz* was being treated seriously in nationalist circles. On the occasion of the launching, the 'red-brown' newspaper *Zavtra* hailed this 'quality conceptual-analytical journal' for 'forming a new style (and image!) of the Russian nationalist, responding to the demands of the times, but not renouncing higher ideals.'[119] One sign of *Russkii Obraz*'s appeal was the fact that it was on sale not only at the conservative Writers' Union but also at Moscow's Mayakovskii Museum and the fashionable left-wing bookshop Falanster.[120] The journal's prestige helped to propel Russkii Obraz's ascent as a public organisation. On the one hand, the journal played an organising role, establishing links with diverse groupuscules in far-right subcultures. On the other, it helped to formulate the basic tenets of the organisation's ideology.

The Fedorov campaign

One of the great ironies of the history of Russkii Obraz is that its leaders' first experience of electoral politics involved campaigning for a prominent liberal reformer. In the autumn of 2003, Goryachev and Tikhonov worked on the Duma election campaign of Boris Fedorov, a liberal politician who had served as Finance Minister in the early 1990s. This convergence reflected both their readiness to

compromise with the system and a kind of ideological affinity. Unlike most liberals, Fedorov was prepared to use xenophobia as a political weapon. After serving as Finance Minister in the early 1990s, he had founded 'Vpered, Rossiya!' (Forward Russia!), a 'party of patriotic conservatives' that was ostensibly modelled on the US Republican Party.[121] The party was a failure, but Fedorov served for three years in the Duma and hoped to return to the legislature in the December 2003 poll. His campaign for the seat of Moscow's Lyublino district, a hotbed of ethnic tension, was assisted by a whole cohort of young ultra-nationalists. Apart from Goryachev and Tikhonov, Fedorov's team included Aleksandr Potkin (the leader of DPNI), Maksim 'Tesak' Martsinkevich (leader of the skinhead gang Format-18), and Semen 'Bus' Tokmakov (leader of the skinhead gang Russkaya Tsel').[122]

They crafted a campaign that vilified immigrants in luridly racist terms as a threat to the lives and livelihood of Muscovites. Although Fedorov publicly disavowed racism, he had no qualms about linking ethnicity and terrorism. On one occasion, he declared that 'not every Chechen is terrorist, but almost every terrorist is a Chechen.' To dramatise the point, he unveiled his own 'Anti-Terrorist Centre,' which provided an information line for citizens to denounce suspicious outsiders.[123] The centre promised a reward of 100,000 roubles for the prevention of a terrorist attack and 30,000 for the discovery of an arms cache.[124] In fact, its first two weeks of functioning uncovered not one terrorist. 90% of the calls were complaints about suspected illegal immigrants.[125]

This ethnic hostility was fanned by Fedorov's own campaign advertising, which carried warnings that Caucasian criminals were not only taking control of local markets but were preparing to seize power in the city.[126] Subway train carriages were plastered with stickers bearing Fedorov's photograph and two inflammatory captions. One affirmed that 'Russians must not be second class citizens.' The other promised, in racially-charged language, that 'We will impose order on the "black" markets of Moscow!'[127]

A justification for these provocative slogans was elaborated in Fedorov's campaign newspaper, which featured a long article about the threat posed by ethnic mafias to Muscovites. Written in the language of a police report, this article had originally appeared nearly a year earlier in the far-right broadsheet *Zavtra*. It was the work of Valentin Uvarov, a former police colonel and an aide to a Duma deputy. After surveying the crimes of various Caucasian gangs, Uvarov identified the Azerbaijani 'fruit mafia' as the most serious threat. Abetted by corrupt police and municipal officials, this 'mafia' had established a stranglehold over Moscow's fresh food markets. According to Uvarov, this development threatened not only the living standards and health of Muscovites but also their very survival:

> The situation in Moscow is now more and more reminiscent of Yugoslavia's Kosovo, which also methodically and with the permission of the authorities settled Albanian Muslims, who systematically expelled the local population. The point is that Albanians were precisely a 'vegetable mafia' which expelled Serbs from vegetable depots and markets in Kosovo. The technology is one and the same.[128]

Here, in the campaign advertising of a supposedly liberal politician, were two of the abiding obsessions that would define the ideology of Russkii Obraz: the menace of non-Slavic immigration and the idea that the defeat of Serbia in Kosovo was a rehearsal for the destruction of Russia.

Fedorov was not the only politician to exploit racism during the 2003 election cycle. Vladimir Zhirinovskii, the LDPR leader, provoked outrage after using a televised election debate to claim that 'Chinese, Vietnamese, Azerbaijanis, Georgians, [and] Armenians have seized all the crucial posts in the country, all the banks, all the shopping centres, all the hotels, everything that's good!'[129] Even more inflammatory was German Sterligov, the Russian Orthodox businessman, who used his campaign for mayor of Moscow to denounce the 'colonisation' of Moscow by Caucasians, to promise the expulsion of 2 million immigrants from the city, and to threaten the execution of ethnic drug dealers.[130] Despite this clamour, Fedorov's efforts to exploit ethnic animosity did attract considerable attention. In an article about Fedorov's embrace of nationalism, *Izvestiya* labelled him a 'former democratic' politician.[131] *Novaya Gazeta*, mocking his slogan about Chechens and terrorists, quipped that 'not every fool is a chauvinist but every chauvinist is a fool.'[132] SOVA Center, the principal Russian NGO dedicated to monitoring xenophobia, devoted no less than three reports to the effusions of hate speech emanating from Fedorov's campaign.[133]

Although Fedorov failed to win the seat, the campaign was a formative moment for the Russkii Obraz team. For the first time, they had worked with a prominent public figure in a major political contest. In an editorial, they reflected that

> the election campaign in the autumn–winter of 2003 can become an excellent testing ground for many young, educated, and ambitious patriots – now we know how not to behave, [and] what is the mechanism of falsification, in short – we now have EXPERIENCE.

Hinting at their distrust of Fedorov's liberalism, they added that 'it is essential to acquire the RUDIMENTS OF POLITICAL MANAGEMENT, if necessary – to learn from one's political opponents, who greatly excel us in these matters.' Disorganised violence like the skinhead riot in Manezh Square on 9 June 2002 was both counterproductive and dangerous. Far greater impact would be achieved by mastering the art of politics, by making successful careers, and by abandoning the margins for the mainstream of public life:

> Remember: one can defeat the System only from within, on the outside it is virtually invulnerable. And we, penetrating it from without, will become like cancer cells in its sick body. Then the law of transition from quantitative into qualitative will begin to operate: when the number of 'cancer cells' exceeds the threshold permitted for the System, it will be unable to function. We will control it. There are no other possibilities.[134]

In other words, the colonisation of the state was a path not merely to power, but to revolution, to the defeat of 'the System.'

During 2003–4, the takeover of 'the System' seemed an impossible goal. On the political landscape, the young intellectuals of Russkii Obraz were a negligible force. They lacked a public profile and contacts with state institutions. This is hardly surprising. Some of them were finishing university; others were embarking on their professional careers. The realm of nationalist politics was dominated by the Rodina bloc, with its phalanx of Duma deputies, and by the Movement against Illegal Immigration, with its grassroots networks. Nevertheless, the low profile of Russkii Obraz obscured its latent potential. In their narrow milieu, its leaders were accumulating political capital for elevating the intellectual level of far-right discourse. They were mastering new skills, in public relations, in the media, in the blogosphere, and in political campaigning. And they were developing new connections, in the divergent worlds of politics, the media, and the skinhead underground. When the Kremlin began to purge the sphere of systemic politics in 2005–6, they were ideally placed to exploit the political vacuum.

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3 Foot soldiers of the preventive counter-revolution

> If revolutionary technologies are thrown against us, we will defend ourselves, using countering technologies, acting sometimes as a counter-revolutionary, and sometimes as a deliberate revolutionary force.
>
> – Gleb Pavlovskii, Kremlin political consultant, December 2004[1]

> There are maniacs everywhere. There is no great cause without rubbish, but if people with bricks come to us, there will be no place for them amongst us, our party is not intended for political Dr. Lecters.
>
> – Ivan Demidov, director of the *Russkii Proekt* of Edinaya Rossiya, 2007[2]

Between 2005 and 2007, Russkii Obraz grew from an amateur journal into an organising centre of radical nationalist activism. Some of its members became deeply involved in legal nationalist politics. As advisers to far-right Duma deputies, they learned to use the machinery of the state to protect their friends and harm their foes. Other members of Russkii Obraz were focused on the far-right music subculture, a meeting place for neo-Nazi youth, skinheads, and football hooligans. The group's band, Khuk Sprava, became both a recruiting tool and a kind of ideological platform.

As they established their reputations on the outer limits of the extreme right, the leaders of Russkii Obraz also began to cooperate with the Putin regime. They found niches in an array of Kremlin-backed structures, which offered both lucrative remuneration and professional opportunities. As journalists, they contributed to loyalist publications and to the cable television station SPAS. As activists, they worked on political projects developed by the ruling party, Edinaya Rossiya, to co-opt nationalists and to appeal to the nationalist electorate.

This chapter seeks to explain the paradox that Russkii Obraz was simultaneously collaborating with the state and with some of the most violent and politically extreme elements in Russian society. It argues that these divergent engagements were made possible by the Kremlin's 'preventive counter-revolution,' a programme of measures designed to protect Russia from an anti-authoritarian 'coloured revolution.' In three ways, the 'preventive counter-revolution' fostered a rapprochement between the regime and the far-right. First, it narrowed the ideological gulf between the regime and the radical nationalist milieu, which were

now united by an illiberal anti-Westernism and by a counter-revolutionary posture. Second, it brought figures from far-right subcultures into a variety of Kremlin-backed structures, which became bridges between the regime and the far-right. And third, it meant that the Putin regime and the far-right now shared a common enemy in the liberal and leftist advocates of a 'coloured' revolutionary strategy. As a result of these developments, numerous far-right militants gravitated into the orbit of the Putin regime. In the case of members of Russkii Obraz, proximity to power brought political opportunities.

The intermediaries

The Kremlin's 'preventive counter-revolution' was triggered by the shock of Ukraine's Orange Revolution of 2004, which represented both a geopolitical defeat for Vladimir Putin and a demonstration of the vulnerability of his regime.[3] During the spring of 2005, there was growing speculation about the possibility of an 'Orangist' revolutionary upheaval, a 'Moscow Maidan,' during the election cycle of 2007–8. What lent credibility to this speculation was the emergence of potential revolutionary actors. A galaxy of prominent politicians, including Mikhail Kas'yanov, Boris Nemtsov, Garry Kasparov, and Dmitrii Rogozin, had begun jockeying for the leadership of a potential anti-Putin uprising. On the streets, young militants, both liberal and radical leftists, had begun to emulate the methods and the strategies pioneered by 'coloured' protesters in the Serbian, Georgian, and Ukrainian revolutions. Official anxiety over these developments was exacerbated by the eruption of mass demonstrations against cuts to social benefits in early 2005.

The Kremlin's response to the 'coloured' threat was masterminded by two men: Vladislav Surkov, the deputy head of the Presidential Administration; and Gleb Pavlovskii, the Kremlin consultant who headed the Foundation for Effective Politics. They conceived and implemented a 'preventive counter-revolution' that was both repressive and mobilisational. Its repression targeted the political and social forces that had spearheaded the 'coloured revolutions' in the former Soviet space. In order to pacify the pre-election political landscape, the Kremlin used administrative pressure and covert measures to oust the leaders of parties that threatened to become part of a revolutionary coalition. In order to deter civil society from acting as an instigator and organiser of protest, new legislation subjected NGOs to intrusive bureaucratic controls. In order to prevent the mass occupations of public space that broke the will of regimes during revolutionary crises, the right to freedom of assembly was drastically curtailed. During 2006–8, street marches by the Other Russia coalition were regularly dispersed by large contingents of OMON riot police.

No less significant was the mobilisational aspect of the 'preventive counter-revolution.' To reduce its dependence on the security apparatus, the Kremlin created a panoply of counter-revolutionary structures. New media platforms were entrusted with waging an information war against the opposition. To turn civil society from an agent of disruption into a bulwark of authoritarianism, the new Public Chamber channelled state funding to loyalist NGOs, which promoted conservative values and tried to discredit outspoken human rights NGOs as Western

pawns. The most important innovation, however, was the establishment of a host of pro-Kremlin youth organisations, which were intended both to divert youth rebellion into harmless channels and to constitute a counter-force to a coloured uprising in the streets.

The prototype of these youth organisations was Nashi ('Ours'), which was unveiled in March 2005. From the outset, Nashi's counter-revolutionary function was clear. At a preliminary meeting with Nashi's leadership group in St. Petersburg, Surkov explained that 'external rule has been introduced in Georgia, Serbia, and Ukraine as a result of coups, something that cannot be permitted in Russia.'[4] To protect Russia against this threat, Nashi would mobilise loyalist crowds. The underlying reasoning was that the Kremlin could not rely upon the security forces in a revolutionary crisis. In the words of Gleb Pavlovskii, 'the police are not needed on political territory, where the healthy forces of society can operate.'[5]

To mobilise those 'healthy forces,' Nashi relied on a combination of material incentives and a phoney rebelliousness. On the one hand, it was supported by pro-Kremlin oligarchs, whose largesse enabled Nashi to fund its massive public spectacles and its annual camp at Lake Seliger.[6] Institutional connections also made it possible for Nashi to offer its cadres opportunities for professional advancement. On the other hand, Nashi struck an anti-establishment, revolutionary pose. Its leaders regularly lambasted the ruling party and the current generation of 'defeatist' bureaucrats. Its manifesto featured a chapter on 'Our Revolution,' a blueprint for a 'revolution in content, not in form.'[7] At the same time, Nashi consciously emulated the methods of the coloured revolutionaries. Its first major show of force, a demonstration by 60,000 students in central Moscow, was presented as 'a real Russian Maidan.'[8]

It was far from self-evident that Nashi and related Kremlin-backed youth organisations would provide opportunities for the Russian far-right. Nashi may have been ideologically nebulous, but its propaganda and its self-image were structured around opposition to fascism. Nashi, whose official title was 'Youth Democratic Anti-fascist Movement Nashi,' justified its anti-fascist pretensions in two ways. First, it identified 'the struggle with fascism in Russia' as a priority of the movement. At Nashi's founding conference in April 2005, its leader Vasilii Yakemenko vowed 'to call fascists "fascists",' to publish anti-fascist materials, and to organise 'anti-fascist patrols.'[9] The organisation's most elaborate anti-fascist statement was a 12-page booklet titled 'Extraordinary Fascism. A programme for the Struggle against Fascism.' Intended to be hung as a wall poster, this booklet called for vigilance against a fascist threat that was assuming new forms, notably the national bolshevism of Eduard Limonov's NBP.[10] The second aspect of Nashi's anti-fascism was a claim to the legacy of the Soviet wartime struggle against Nazism. The climax of its spectacular demonstration in Moscow's Leninskii Prospekt on 15 May 2005 was a ritualistic 'passing of the baton' between generations of patriots. A thousand veterans of the Great Patriotic War lined up to face columns of Nashi youths, who recited an oath about accepting the Motherland from the hand of the older generation. Each veteran heard the oath from 60 youths, and responded with the gift of a wartime cartridge case inscribed with the words 'Remember the war, protect the Motherland.'[11]

There were limits, however, to Nashi's anti-fascism. Its construction of the fascist enemy revolved around Limonov's National Bolsheviks. The brochure 'Extraordinary Fascism' counterposed original images from Nazi Germany to photographs of NBP posters, banners and rallies. Although the history of NBP provided abundant ammunition for critics of its flirtation with fascism, it had long ceased to be a major manifestation of fascism in contemporary Russia. Unlike numerous groups of the neo-Nazi underground, NBP had no record of racist violence. There were many other far-right organisations that posed a far more dangerous threat to public order. Moreover, NBP's extremism had been tempered by its ideological evolution since the late 1990s. Its obsession with fascism had abated with the departure of Aleksandr Dugin, the principal populariser of European fascist ideas in post-Soviet Russia.[12] At the same time, the party had placed an increasing emphasis on civil liberties and democratic freedoms, which led to its collaboration with liberals in the Other Russia coalition and ultimately to the Strategy-31 campaign for freedom of assembly. As Limonov noted in his party newspaper, 'the attempt to portray NBP as fascists should have been undertaken, say, in 1995, and perhaps then it would have succeeded.'[13]

What made NBP an ideal target for Nashi was its collaboration with liberal and leftist political forces that were the potential driving force of a 'coloured revolution.' This convergence was exploited by the architects of the 'preventive counter-revolution' to smear these forces as 'fascist sympathisers.' Vladislav Surkov had claimed as early as September 2004 that 'certain Apples' (the liberals of Yabloko) and 'Lemons' (Limonovites) were growing from the same branch: 'false liberals and real Nazis have more and more in common.'[14] During 2005, the notion that liberals were contaminated by fascist proclivities became a leitmotif of Nashi's propaganda. Yakemenko repeatedly vowed to put an end to 'the unnatural alliance of oligarchs and anti-Semites, Nazis and liberals.'[15] Nashi's brochure 'Extraordinary Fascism' devoted two pages to 'Sympathisers of Fascists in Russia,' but it had nothing to say about the prominent far-right ideologue Aleksandr Sevast'yanov, a leading biological racist, a defender of neo-Nazi skinheads, and a leader of the National Great Power Party of Russia. Nor did it allude to the Movement against Illegal Immigration, a rising force in the mid-2000s. Instead, Nashi raised the alarm about two 'fascist sympathisers' in the liberal opposition: Irina Khakamada, a former leader of the Union of Right Forces, and Il'ya Yashin, the leader of Young Yabloko.[16]

Nashi's eccentric understanding of fascism and its highly selective choice of 'fascist' targets facilitated its engagement with football gangs that intersected with far-right subcultures. This engagement built upon the foundations laid by Idushchie Vmeste, the original pro-Kremlin youth organisation, which supplied the leadership and the organisational infrastructure of the new movement. Idushchie Vmeste had employed football gang members both in its security staff and in leadership roles. The most prominent was Aleksei Mitryushin, a leader of the football gang Gallant Steeds, who had served as head of Idushchie Vmeste's branch for northeastern Moscow. It was Mitryushin who had attracted the attention of *Novaya Gazeta* in the aftermath of the Tsaritsyno pogrom, which had been perpetrated by OB-88 skinhead fighters suspected of links to Idushchie Vmeste.[17]

Despite the adverse publicity, Mitryushin resurfaced as a major figure in Nashi in the spring of 2005. Officially the Technical Director of the organisation's Moscow branch, he was widely reputed to be the ringleader of a band of fighters that Nashi was assembling to disperse revolutionary crowds.[18]

Nashi's enlistment of football gang members was exposed on the weekend of 27–28 February 2005. The young pro-democracy activist Il'ya Yashin and the journalist Oleg Kashin infiltrated a training conference for Nashi 'commissars' at Senezh, a holiday complex in Moscow region owned by the Presidential Administration.[19] The vast majority of the participants were veterans of Idushchie Vmeste and fresh recruits from universities. Standing apart from these activists was a 'security service' of 30–40 'rather menacing, tough, shaven-headed lads,' whose conversation was littered with references to football gangs.[20] Within hours of their arrival, the two infiltrators were exposed and taken to Yakemenko for questioning. Then they were escorted off the premises by four shaven-headed men from the security service led by Mitryushin, who threw Yashin headlong into a snow drift, and then kicked him as he lay on the ground.[21] Between blows, Mitryushin explained that Yashin was a part of a 'fifth column' and could therefore be dealt with according to the rules of the criminal world (*po ponyatiyam*).[22]

This act of thuggery was not an accident. It was part of a conscious policy to transform experienced street fighters into a counter-revolutionary force. This policy had been prefigured by Nashi's leader, Vasilii Yakemenko in a speech to a closed meeting of Nashi recruits in Kursk. Football hooligans, argued Yakemenko, could have dispersed the revolutionary crowds in Kiev:

> If I had to resolve a matter on the Maidan, in view of the general lack of will, I would resolve it very simply. I would contact my colleagues from the fan movement of [the football team] Spartak. They would bring about 5,000 of their supporters with those blue plastic chairs, which they use to fight in stadiums, and we would put them on five trains. We would bring them to Kiev, as a special kind of package, and with these chairs they would drive away those 100,000 who came out onto the Maidan, all the way to the Dnieper, and then all of them in their tracksuits, like white bears, would jump over the ice floes to the other side.[23]

This speech, which was leaked to the newspaper *Moskovskii komsomolets*, might be dismissed as rhetorical hyperbole. But the idea that Nashi should use force against revolutionary crowds was endorsed by Gleb Pavlovskii, the Kremlin consultant and one of the architects of the 'preventive counter-revolution.' In a speech at Nashi's inaugural camp at Seliger in July 2005, Pavlovskii told a crowd of Nashi cadres that 'your task is to defend the constitutional order, if a coup takes place.'[24] He proceeded to explain that '[y]ou must be ready to disperse fascist demonstrations and to oppose physically an attempted anti-constitutional coup.'[25]

By then, Nashi's security force was waging a campaign of intimidation against Limonov's National Bolsheviks, who had established a reputation as the Kremlin's most daring and irreconcilable opponents. During 2004–5, NBP militants had staged a series of occupations of government offices; they had also

played a conspicuous role in the protests against social welfare reforms. The first reprisal came on 29 January, when a group of football gang members raided the 'Bunker,' the NBP's Moscow headquarters. What was intended to be a media stunt became a fiasco. While a TV crew sent to cover the story was stuck in traffic, the raiders were locked inside the building.[26] More successful was a second sortie on 5 March, when a larger contingent of football gang members returned with their own camera, which they used to film hypodermic needles and vodka bottles they claimed to have found on the premises. NBP activists recognised the intruders as fighters from Gladiators Firm, a gang linked to the fan movement of the Spartak team. They were led by the gang's ringleader Vasilii Stepanov, alias 'Vasya the Hitman' (*Vasya Killer*).[27]

Although Yakemenko publicly denied that Nashi was behind the raids on the NBP Bunker, there was abundant evidence of the links between Nashi and Gladiators Firm.[28] One of the leaders of Gladiators Firm, Roman Verbitskii ('Kolyuchii'), worked in Nashi, where he was responsible for 'regional development.'[29] Stepanov combined his involvement in Gladiators Firm with the leadership of Belyi Shchit ('White Shield'), a security firm that maintained order at Nashi's major events.[30]

The risks of relying on football gangs as a security force were dramatised by an incident at Nashi's grandiose inaugural camp at Lake Seliger. For two weeks in July 2005, over 3,000 young recruits were prepared for a confrontation with 'coloured revolution' in a programme of physical exercises, lectures from pro-Kremlin political technologists, and patriotic rituals. The Kremlin's patronage was underlined by a visit to the camp by Vladislav Surkov and by an invitation for a group of leading commissars to have lunch with President Putin at the presidential residence at Zavidovo. What attracted less attention was a series of skirmishes that erupted when Nashi's security team from Stepanov's Belyi Shchit, all Spartak fans from Gladiators Firm, encountered visiting gang members who supported the rival TsSKA team. According to the newspaper *Nasha Versiya*, Nashi's guards recognised their traditional enemies and beat them up. One day later, a larger group of TsSKA gang members arrived at Seliger to exact revenge. Flouting the traditional code of conduct for football gangs, the men from Gladiators Firm declined the challenge and threatened to call the police, claiming that 'this is no longer a settling of scores between fans, but a political action.' The standoff was resolved by an agreement for eighty fighters from each gang to meet for an 'honest fight' in mid-August, but Gladiators Firm failed to appear. This backdown was reported as a 'loss of face' in gang circles.[31]

Gladiators Firm's refusal to take up the challenge testified to the impact of the incentives created by its work for Nashi, which contributed to the gang's rapid expansion during 2005. Citing contacts in the football gang milieu, *Nasha Versiya* reported that Gladiators Firm's membership had soared from 20 to 100–150 fighters.[32] This influx reflected the lucrative employment opportunities offered by Gladiators Firm's provision of security services to Nashi. But it also testified to the attractions of the impunity offered by a quasi-official structure like Nashi, which became a kind of 'roof' (*krysha*) for violent hooligans who often found themselves on the wrong side of the law.

The reality of this protection was demonstrated by a major political scandal that erupted barely a month after the Seliger camp. On the evening of 29 August 2005, the Kremlin intervened to protect a band of fighters from Gladiators Firm who attacked a meeting of left-wing militants at the Communist Party's Moscow headquarters. The meeting was an obvious target for Nashi because the participants, who included militants from NBP, the Avant-Garde of Red Youth (AKM) and Rodina, were discussing the creation of a broad left-wing coalition.[33] Wielding baseball bats and wearing white construction gloves (a trademark of football gangs), the fighters from Gladiators Firm stormed the building and assaulted the NBP activists who were guarding the foyer.[34] Four of the victims were hospitalised: three with concussion; one with broken bones in both hands.[35] The attackers then made their getaway on a bus that was driven by Roman Verbitskii.[36] Intercepted by police cars, the attackers were detained and brought for questioning to Danilovskii police station. To the consternation of the arresting officers, the detainees appeared unconcerned. According to one officer, Verbitskii 'very confidently vowed to have us stripped of our shoulder straps.'[37]

This effrontery was soon vindicated by the intercession of Nikita Ivanov, the 31-year-old deputy head of the Kremlin's Department for Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries.[38] Thanks to Ivanov, Verbitskii and his fighters were chauffeured out of the station in police cars to avoid confronting a crowd of journalists. Humiliated both by Gladiators Firm and by the Kremlin, the police were reported to be 'furious.'[39] One measure of their frustration was the leaking of the names of Verbitskii's entire contingent to the media.[40]

The incident became a major embarrassment both for Nashi and for its Kremlin sponsors. To contain the scandal, the Presidential Administration put pressure on the mainstream media to suppress the story. An exposé of Nashi's role in the attack was removed from the mass-circulation daily *Moskovskii komsomolets* and replaced by an article insinuating that the entire incident had been a 'provocation' designed to boost the Duma candidacy of Mikhail Khodorkovskii, the imprisoned oligarch.[41] Despite the cover-up, a combination of investigative journalism, official leaks, and declarations from opposition leaders made it impossible to conceal official complicity in the attack. Within two weeks, Il'ya Barabanov, a journalist for *Gazeta*, exposed Nikita Ivanov's visit to the police station. When Barabanov inquired about Ivanov's role in the Presidential Administration, the Kremlin's press-service denied that he was on the payroll. Confronted with evidence that Ivanov was no less than the deputy head of a major department, the press-service refused to allow him to be interviewed.[42]

One result of the scandal was the emasculation of Nashi, which quietly dissociated itself from the football gang members who had constituted its fighting force. The most prominent victim of this reorientation was Aleksei Mitryushin, who was widely identified in the media as the link between the Nashi and football gangs.[43] Interviewed by *Gazeta*, Mitryushin was forced to defend Gallant Steeds, claiming that 'there was never any racial hatred.' The interviewer retorted that in 2001 a publication linked to the gang had published articles about the swastika and the problems of illegal immigration. Cornered, Mitryushin reinforced the allegation by insisting that the articles merely compared fascist symbols with

those used in religious iconography.[44] By early 2006, Mitryushin had departed *Nashi*. According to a Kremlin source quoted by *Kommersant"*, Mitryushin 'had come into the spotlight during the conflict with the National Bolsheviks and is spoiling the reputation of the movement.'[45] Ironically, his departure contributed to the cancellation of a massive anti-racism festival in Moscow, which Yakemenko had announced with much fanfare in late 2005. No one else in Nashi was able to mobilise the security personnel needed for such a grandiose undertaking.[46] During the years that followed, Nashi was effectively banned from contacts with football gangs. Former Nashi functionaries reported that their activities in the organisation had been closely monitored by agents of the FSB and the anti-extremism Tsentr 'E', who warned them against any kind of interaction with football fans and the NBP.[47]

Despite the adverse publicity they generated, football gang leaders remained active participants in the Kremlin's 'preventive counter-revolution.' After a period of obscurity, Roman Verbitskii reappeared at Nashi's Seliger camp in July 2008. As leader of Nashi's Volunteer Youth Militia (Dobrovol'naya Molodezhnaya Druzhina, DMD), he publicly discussed the organisation's training programme with the deputy prime minister, Igor Shuvalov.[48] The DMD was notorious both for its violent counter-revolutionary training exercises and for its intimidation of disaffected former members of the movement.[49] Behind the scenes, according to hacked email correspondence, Verbitskii also played an instrumental role in that year's denial-of-service attacks on the newspaper *Kommersant"*, which was coordinated by Nashi.[50]

More important for the development of 'managed nationalism' was the subsequent trajectory of Aleksei Mitryushin. Soon after his ejection from Nashi, Mitryushin resurfaced as a leader of Mestnye ('Locals'), a loyalist youth organisation sponsored by the administration of Moscow region. By 2007, Mitryushin had also become a coordinator of Edinaya's Rossiya's 'Russian Project,' an attempt to rally nationalist opinion behind the ruling party ahead of that year's Duma elections. In this capacity, he worked closely with far-right militants.

The rise of Mestnye exemplified the new division of labour between pro-Kremlin youth organisations. Nashi, because of its close identification with the Kremlin, was kept on a short leash. Never again would its auxiliaries stage violent public attacks on opposition youth. Organisations like Mestnye, however, were given carte blanche to continue the war of attrition that Nashi had started. In April 2006, Leonid Simunin, the head of Mestnye's Lyubertsy branch, led a gang of fighters in an attack on Eduard Limonov, the NBP leader, outside the Taganka courthouse in Moscow.[51] The resulting brawl served as a pretext to prosecute prominent NBP activists. Although he was an aggressor, Simunin was treated by the police as an innocent victim of a violent crime. In 2008, his testimony contributed to the sentencing of seven NBP activists to prison terms.[52]

No less significant was the ideological licence enjoyed by the new pro-Kremlin youth organisations. While Nashi was constrained by its anodyne 'anti-fascism,' its smaller rivals were allowed to adopt ethnonationalist slogans and to recruit militants from far-right subcultures. Mestnye, formally an association of 'patriotic ecologists,' was transformed during 2006 by an influx of radical nationalists.

One of the most prominent was Aleksandr Kazakov, a leading activist of Rodina's youth organisation, who had spearheaded that party's anti-immigrant agitation in the autumn of 2005.[53] When Rodina was crushed by Kremlin pressure in early 2006, Kazakov moved to Mestnye, where he quickly rose to the position of 'ideologist.'[54] Kazakov's arrival was followed by a reorientation of Mestnye's activism in the aftermath of anti-Caucasian riots in Kondopoga in September 2006. Copying Nashi's efforts to mimic the revolutionary pathos of 'Orangist' youth groups, Mestnye launched an anti-immigrant campaign that replicated slogans and the methods of the Movement against Illegal Immigration (DPNI). On 26 November 2006, it staged simultaneous raids on 20 markets in Moscow region, detaining 73 suspected illegal immigrants and handing them over to police. One measure of the violence of these raids was the arrest of three Mestnye activists for assaulting market traders. Asked about parallels between Mestnye and DPNI methods, Mestnye's leader Sergei Fateev boasted that 'the DPNI just talks and can do nothing, but we act.'[55]

A parallel trajectory was traced by Rossiya Molodaya ('Young Russia,' RuMol), one of the most militant pro-Kremlin youth organisations. From its inception, RuMol was a nationalist project. It was created as a youth auxiliary to Dmitrii Rogozin's Rodina Party in May 2005 by Maksim Mishchenko, a postgraduate engineering student at Moscow's Bauman Technical University.[56] In the autumn of 2005, as pressure mounted on Rogozin, Mishchenko broke with Rodina and aligned RuMol with the Kremlin. During 2006–7, his militants became notorious for their relentless harassment of the liberal and leftist opposition. They led a donkey named 'Kas'yanov' into the founding congress of Mikhail Kas'yanov's Russian Popular Democratic Union.[57] They tormented the NBP leader Eduard Limonov with 'food ambushes' – well-aimed eggs at public functions – that were the trademark of his own party.[58]

RuMol's engagement with the ultranationalist milieu may date to its efforts to establish a paramilitary division, RuMol Ul'tras, whose fighters were to be trained in unarmed combat.[59] In December 2006, Vladislav Surkov praised this initiative at a closed meeting at Bauman University.[60] Both as trainers and as recruits, skinheads could make an obvious contribution to the realisation of RuMol Ul'tras. At the same time, RuMol formulated its own nationalist doctrine, which revolved around the rehabilitation of the concept of *russkii* (ethnic Russian), a central preoccupation of Russian nationalists.[61]

The appearance of the second generation of pro-Kremlin youth movements like Mestnye and RuMol was crucial for development of 'managed nationalism.' On the one hand, they drew representatives of far-right subcultures into Kremlin-aligned structures, which served both as a shield against repression and as a platform for activism. On the other, they became a bridge between the Presidential Administration and the broader far-right milieu. This phenomenon was exemplified by the rise of Russkii Obraz. During 2008–9, Il'ya Goryachev interacted with the Presidential Administration through two intermediaries involved in pro-Kremlin youth organisations: Aleksei Mitryushin, the football gang leader who graduated from Nashi to Mestnye; and Simunin, the ringleader of the Mestnye militants who had ambushed Limonov outside the Taganka courthouse.

Goryachev's closest public collaborator was Maksim Mishchenko, the leader of RuMol.

Radical nationalists also drew important lessons from the Kremlin's intercession for Roman Verbitskii. Russkii Obraz's path to political terror was partly inspired by the evidence that pro-Kremlin militants could acquire a kind of impunity from prosecution. In 2007, when Nikita Tikhonov was in hiding to avoid arrest for the murder of an Antifa sympathiser, Goryachev drew his attention to the precedent of Verbitskii to prove that impunity could be bought by becoming a violent proxy for the regime. Although Tikhonov rejected Goryachev's suggestion that he target members of the Other Russia opposition coalition, the discussion led directly to the identification of BORN's first victims.[62]

RE:aktsiya

While Nashi was reaching out to football gangs, other Kremlin-backed structures were cultivating nationalist intellectuals. Central to the 'preventive counter-revolution' was the promotion of a cohort of pro-Kremlin commentators, who became ubiquitous figures on the major television stations. With relentless repetitiveness, they claimed that Russia's survival was threatened by Western efforts to foment a 'Moscow Maidan,' a revolutionary upheaval in Russia. The corollary was that Russia needed to embark on its own special path as a 'sovereign democracy' that was capable of suppressing the enemy within. In its anti-Western xenophobia, its rejection of liberal democracy, and its hostility to international norms, this message overlapped with basic tenets of radical nationalist ideology. Both in terms of their polemical expertise and in terms of motivation, members of the inner circle of Russkii Obraz were well equipped to contribute to this ideological renovation.

The opportunities offered to young far-right intellectuals by the 'preventive counter-revolution' was exemplified by the pro-Kremlin youth newspaper *RE:aktsiya*, which employed both Il'ya Goryachev and Nikita Tikhonov as journalists. Launched in 2004, *RE:aktsiya* was part of a panoply of initiatives that were intended to weaken the attraction of 'Orangist' youth organisations. Goryachev claimed that the newspaper was one of a multitude of semi-commercial structures that were secretly funded in cash by the Presidential Administration. This outsourcing created opportunities for considerable local initiative. According to Goryachev, '[*RE:aktsiya*'s] function was to be a media mouthpiece for pro-Kremlin youth groups,' but 'in truth the editor was not particularly interested in this – he simply pursued his own project with Kremlin money.'[63]

Exploiting the lack of oversight, some contributors used *RE:aktsiya* as an arena in which to pursue their own ideological vendettas, always concealed behind an anti-Orangist shroud. The left-wing publicist, Vladlen Tupikin, published a series of highly critical interviews with leading liberal 'Orangist' youth activists like Il'ya Yashin and Anastasiya Karimova.[64] At the opposite end of the spectrum, the newspaper's far-right contributors seized every opportunity to denounce their liberal foes. Aleksei Baranovskii, a militant of the neo-Nazi groupuscule Krasnyi Blitskrig, boasted that *RE:aktsiya* provided him and his friends, Goryachev and Tikhonov, with an outlet for aggression:

> This was a powerful troika – Il'ya Goryachev, Aleksei Baranovskii and [Nikita] Tikhonov. We worked as a Team for several periodical publications. Journalist killers. We killed everyone who we didn't like. Our articles usually evoked considerable resonance, particularly when they came from the soul.[65]

What made Baranovskii's language particularly macabre was the fact that it was written in the aftermath of arrest of Tikhonov on murder charges. For Baranovskii, verbal combat had preceded actual killings.

RE:aktsiya offered opportunities for the members of the 'Team' to 'write from the soul' about their ideological preoccupations. Tikhonov's contributions included articles about the influence of Islam on Limonov's NBP and the 60th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany.[66] Baranovskii himself wrote a scathing account of the ineptitude of the state's efforts to use anti-extremism legislation against nationalists.[67] Goryachev found a platform for his Serbophilia. In a long article about a visit to the Balkans, he recounted meetings with Serbian nationalist militants and travel through 'occupied' Kosovo.[68]

The seepage of Russkii Obraz's ideas into pro-Kremlin propaganda is exemplified by a kind of manifesto published by Il'ya Goryachev in *RE:aktsiya* in March 2006. Ostensibly the article was an attack on two opposition youth organisations, the liberal Oborona and Limonov's NBP. Goryachev portrayed both organisations as bearers of Russophobia. According to him, some militants of Oborona believed that there was no difference between Stalin's Red Army and Hitler's Wehrmacht. At the opposite end of the opposition spectrum, NBP leader Eduard Limonov had lambasted the Tsarist 'prison of peoples' and spoken sympathetically about radicals who had converted to Islam. Both these heresies, argued Goryachev, had common roots in the hostility of liberals to the Russian state:

> … liberals think that Russia is a misunderstanding, which represents a danger to the entire world. How can this danger be liquidated? Simple: liquidate the country itself, smashing it into a multiplicity of feudal 'principalities,' as it was before the Tatar-Mongol yoke. To the joy of separatists.

Goryachev proceeded to trace this 'liberal myth' to the readiness of nineteenth century Russian revolutionaries to applaud foreign invaders like Napoleon as liberators.[69]

The trio's run at *RE:aktsiya* came to an end in the spring of 2006, when the newspaper's editorial staff was revamped. Baranovskii quipped that 'we were exchanged for Kashin and Parker.'[70] 'Mr Parker,' the nom de plume of the pro-Kremlin blogger Maksim Kononenko, became the new chief editor. Oleg Kashin, the journalist who had infiltrated Nashi's secret conference at Senezh,' became the political editor. Both were proteges of Gleb Pavlovskii, the Kremlin consultant who was one of the architects of the 'preventive counter-revolution.' Both were scathing critics of the liberal opposition and of radical nationalism. After this setback, the Team soon found a period of employment at another tabloid, *Argumenty nedeli*.[71] Unlike a pro-Kremlin project, however, *Argumenty nedeli* offered few opportunities for political engagement. As a special correspondent,

Tikhonov churned out articles on 'social themes' and other innocuous topics until the late summer of 2006.[72]

A journalistic career, however, was no obstacle to involvement in the far-right underground. While Tikhonov worked for *RE:aktsiya* and *Argumenty nedeli*, he retained contact with comrades from his old gang, OB-88. It was a time when Antifa militants had begun to challenge neo-Nazi terror in the streets. Tikhonov joined a group of five skinheads, including Aleksandr Parinov from OB-88, who retaliated with a punitive expedition. On 16 April 2006, they ambushed a group of unarmed youths heading to a concert by bands known for attracting Antifa crowds.[73] In the melee, a 19-year-old student, Aleksandr Ryukhin, was fatally stabbed, and his friend, Egor Tomskii, was left with serious injuries. Police soon arrested three of the assailants: Aleksandr Shitov, Andrei Antsiferov and Vasilii Reutskii. During the course of the investigation, another veteran of OB-88, Aleksandr Bormot ('Borman') named Tikhonov as the murderer.[74] Apparently tipped off about his impending arrest, Tikhonov arrived at work one day in the summer of 2006 and informed the editors that he was resigning and leaving on a permanent basis. In fact, he was going into hiding.[75]

SPAS

Soon after Goryachev and Tikhonov left *RE:aktsiya*, Russkii Obraz gained a foothold in another major pro-Kremlin platform, the 'Public Orthodox Television Station' SPAS. Launched in July 2005, SPAS was the brainchild of Ivan Demidov, one of the most prominent advocates of the 'preventive counter-revolution.'[76] A mercurial figure, Demidov worked during perestroika as a manager of the hard-hitting current affairs programme *Vzglyad* and then became a celebrity as host of MuzOboz, the leading Russian television show about pop music in the early 1990s. During the Putin era, Demidov fell under the influence of Aleksandr Dugin, the pro-Kremlin ideologue who cloaked his fascist sympathies behind Eurasianist rhetoric. By Demidov's own admission, the encounter with Dugin became 'a decisive factor, a kind of turning point,' which provided him and his circle with an ideological guru. Now a 'convinced Eurasianist,' Demidov became a crusader for traditional values.[77] He hosted *Russkii Vzglyad* ('Russian View'), a programme ostensibly dedicated to Russian Orthodoxy, which provided a platform for him to interview a wide range of prominent nationalist ideologues.[78]

SPAS, which was available through NTV's cable television network, represented a major expansion of this project. Instead of the occasional interview, it offered prominent pro-Kremlin nationalists the opportunity to host their own television shows.[79] Nataliya Narochnitskaya, a leading ideologue of civilisational nationalism and a Duma deputy from the Rodina bloc, presented a programme dedicated to the 'philosophical-religious analysis' of international relations and political news.[80] More controversial was Demidov's ideological mentor, Aleksandr Dugin, whose penchant for mysticism provoked a public dispute with another presenter, Archpriest Maksim Kozlov.[81]

Despite its ambitions, SPAS never captured the public imagination. Part of the problem was financial. The channel was funded by two businessmen, Aleksandr

Batanov and Gennadii Lysak. Batanov was soon stricken with cancer; and Lysak became the principal suspect in a criminal investigation. Financial problems were compounded by the loss of the creative contribution of Demidov, who took up a post as director of Molodaya Gvardiya, Edinaya Rossiya's youth movement. One journalist likened the quality of SPAS's presentation to that of 'a local district cable station in the mid-1990s.'[82]

It was precisely the weakness of SPAS that created opportunities for Russkii Obraz. In 2006, the station employed Dmitrii Taratorin, a far-right militant and a journalist at the liberal newspaper *Novye Izvestiya*, as its head of political programming. Taratorin had once mingled in the subculture surrounding the NBP of Eduard Limonov, now a leader of the extra-systemic opposition. As late as 2005, the NBP newspaper *Limonka* had even published excerpts from Taratorin's novel, *Virus Vosstaniya*.[83] Taratorin's ideological sympathies, however, lay with Limonov's estranged collaborator, Aleksandr Dugin, who had helped to secure Taratorin his new position at SPAS.[84] Ultimately Taratorin would become the principal ideologist of Russkii Obraz.

Taratorin's contributions to SPAS closely adhered to the Kremlin line about the role of foreign conspirators in fomenting 'coloured revolutions' in the former Soviet space. One presentation, 'The Spectre of Orangism,' claimed that the incipient coalition of the liberal opposition and National Bolsheviks at the Other Russia (Drugaya Rossiya) conference in July 2006 had been instigated by exiled oligarchs and the USA.[85] This allegation provoked an angry telephone call from Limonov, who accused Taratorin of lies and provocations. Since Limonov hung up before he could respond, Taratorin answered with an open letter that offered an elaborate justification for his employment in a pro-Kremlin television station. Taratorin claimed that his move to SPAS was a moment of liberation. His experience of working at *Novye Izvestiya* for three years had demonstrated the impossibility of collaboration with liberals: 'every day, every hour, I felt that we were from different planets' and 'only a war of extermination (of course, of information) is possible between us.' By contrast, SPAS had offered him complete freedom of expression 'because I can bump off these [liberal] nits on my own programme.' Scorning the idea that he had been bought by the Kremlin, Taratorin avowed that 'for the first time in my life I am being paid for saying what I think.' He proceeded to justify collaboration with the Kremlin as a patriotic imperative. On the one hand, an 'Orangist' uprising would precipitate the disintegration of the Russian state. On the other, the Putin regime was embracing National-Bolshevik ideas. According to Taratorin, 'sovereign democracy' was a 'completely Eurasianist formula.'[86]

In late 2007, a year after Taratorin's appointment, he was joined at SPAS by Il'ya Goryachev. That year, Goryachev had attracted the attention of Aleksandr Batanov, SPAS's director and financial backer, when he had instigated Batanov's nomination to third place on the election lists of Narodnyi Soyuz (NS), the nationalist party headed by Sergei Baburin. Although NS's campaign was blocked by the Kremlin, Batanov was sufficiently impressed by Goryachev's campaigning skills to offer him employment as SPAS's head of public relations.[87] Soon Goryachev was also presenting his own programmes to SPAS viewers. Like Taratorin, he

closely echoed the Kremlin line about the foreign origins of domestic unrest. In a documentary titled 'Network Wars,' Goryachev elaborated the idea that the 'coloured revolutions' were the product of Western psychological warfare.'[88]

Despite its shortcomings, SPAS became an important platform for Russkii Obraz. At a time when the information space was being purged, when opposition politicians could find themselves banned from television by 'Stop Lists,' SPAS conferred a kind of legitimacy and respectability on those who appeared on its broadcasts. As Russkii Obraz emerged as a public movement, its leaders exploited SPAS as a forum for public dialogue with state functionaries and sympathetic politicians. Like *RE:aktsiya*, SPAS provided a platform for Goryachev and his friends to advance their own ideological agenda, often cloaked behind the cliches of the 'preventive counter-revolution.' It was also a training ground for the development of audiovisual production skills, which would be used to telling effect in Russkii Obraz's notorious 2009 documentary about the neo-Nazi underground.

The Russian Project

For Il'ya Goryachev, involvement in SPAS was a stepping stone to participation in one of the most important experiments in 'managed nationalism.' This was the Russkii Proekt ('ethnic Russian Project'), an attempt to harness Russian nationalism to United Russia's campaign for the 2007 Duma elections and to neutralise the threat posed by anti-immigrant populism. Like SPAS, the Russkii Proekt was the brainchild of Ivan Demidov, who had served for over a year as the ideologist of United Russia's youth organisation, Molodaya Gvardiya. Demidov unveiled the Russkii Proekt on 3 February 2007 at a round table on 'The Formation of the Russian Nation' at the Centre for Socially Conservative Policy, a think-tank linked to the left-wing faction of United Russia. He presented the initiative as an opportunity to reclaim the terrain of nationalism from extremists. Complaining that 'the words "*russkii*" and "nationalism," have been privatised and discredited by organisations like DPNI,' he announced that 'we want to return their correct meaning.'[89] He was backed up by Aleksei Chadaev, a member of the Public Chamber and a leading pro-Kremlin political technologist, who exhorted 'professional Russians' to theorise the concept of nationalism in terms that would dissociate it from extremism and xenophobia.[90]

The principal ideological statement of the Russkii Proekt was a 'Russian Questionnaire' (*Russkaya anketa*), a set of ten questions and propositions about Russian identity and the role of ethnic Russians (russkie) in the Russian state and in the world:

1. Russia for the Russians (russkie)?
2. What is the Russian nation?
3. The Russian world. Territory and borders.
4. The preservation of national identity in conditions of globalisation.
5. Russian nationalism and racism.
6. Nationalism as an ideology.

7. Russians and Orthodoxy.
8. The coexistence of religions in Russia: prospects.
9. The Russian world and the post-Soviet space.
10. Russian political culture as a means of constructing Russian power.[91]

Demidov suggested that these ten points would serve as a focus of discussion in seminars across Russia, which would provide insights into popular attitudes. 'When we receive responses to the questions,' he promised, 'we will formulate appropriate initiatives, including legislative ones, to determine finally further actions.'[92]

This postponement of decisions on burning issues had obvious advantages for Edinaya Rossiya's courtship of Russian nationalists. Demidov did not have to take sides in bitterly contested debates. Both moderate and radical nationalists could participate in the Russkii Proekt without compromising their principles. Far from offering unconditional loyalty to Edinaya Rossiya, they had entered an arena for ideological contest. The benefits for nationalists who joined the project were considerable. At a time when the regime was obstructing access to the public sphere, the Russkii Proekt offered a public platform and a kind of official sanction to its participants. For those with political ambitions, it was a framework for interaction with state functionaries. For younger activists, it offered opportunities for employment on the project's websites and other media forums.

What was indisputable was that the Russkii Proekt was an expensive undertaking. Il'ya Goryachev claimed that hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent on promoting it by the placing of sympathetic articles in the Moscow press.[93] In addition to this publicity blitz, the Kremlin's largesse funded two major initiatives. The first was an elaborate website, which was launched in May 2007 under the editorship of Natal'ya Androsenko, a 25-year-old nationalist blogger ('Poulon').[94] The contributors included ethnonationalists like Egor Kholmogorov (Androsenko's future husband) and Konstantin Krylov, Orthodox 'civilisational nationalists' like Arkadii Maler, pro-Kremlin propagandists like Mikhail Leont'ev, and an assortment of conservative intellectuals. In July 2007, the site played a conspicuous role in a public controversy about the clericalisation of society, which had been precipitated by an open letter to President Putin from the Nobel Laureate Vitalii Ginzburg and other distinguished academicians. The signatories expressed their opposition to a major initiative of the Russian Orthodox Church, the inclusion in the school curriculum of a course titled 'Foundations of Orthodox Culture.' The Russkii Proekt published a series of rebuttals of the letter, including a declaration by Demidov himself. Reinforcing the demands of some nationalists for the prosecution of the signatories, it also featured a cartoon of Ginzburg in prison uniform and the 'number of the Antichrist' (666) tattooed on his chest.[95]

The Russkii Proekt's second initiative was 'the Russian Club,' an expert discussion forum under the chairmanship of Egor Kholmogorov. Its inaugural session, held on 19 July 2007, was attended by Demidov and ten prominent nationalist and conservative intellectuals.[96] They used the occasion to produce a communique, posted on the Russkii Proekt's website, which denounced the liberal effort to cultivate a civic, 'Rossiiskii,' notion of nationality.[97] No less significant was

an exchange of views with Demidov. According to Kholmogorov, this 'very productive dialogue' with a representative of the party of power was evidence that 'mutual understanding was possible.'[98]

The Russkii Proekt provoked polarised reactions amongst Russian nationalists. Some welcomed it as an overdue concession to Russian national sentiment. Aleksandr Belov (Potkin), the leader of the Movement against Illegal Immigration (DPNI), proclaimed that this 'conjunctural project' was both a vindication of DPNI's struggle and a 'personal victory.'[99] Others lambasted the Russkii Proekt as a cynical attempt to undermine the nationalist movement. According to Dmitrii Rogozin, the recently ousted leader of the Rodina party, the ruling party was trying to assume an alien identity:

> Edinaya Rossiya is so desperate to get into the new Duma that it is ready to change its sex and even its nationality. The desire of the party of power to flirt with the nationalist electorate testifies to the riotous growth of the popularity of the national idea.[100]

No less contemptuous was Konstantin Krylov, editor of the radical nationalist newspaper *Spetsnaz Rossii*, who described the Russkii Proekt as 'an organic part of the anti-Russian campaign, which has been conducted by the authorities in recent years.' This campaign, which involved both the suppression of Russian nationalism and the encouragement of Central Asian immigration, required that 'Russians be deprived of everything, even of their own name.' Far from being a victory, the Russkii Proekt was an act of subjugation, comparable to the Nazi strategy of reopening Orthodox Churches as means of strengthening their domination over occupied Soviet territory.[101]

A very different anxiety troubled some Edinaya Rossiya's rivals in the sphere of systemic politics. In a debate with Demidov on a popular current affairs show, the liberal Duma deputy Boris Nemtsov argued that the Russkii Proekt was a cynical attempt to capture the nationalist electorate:

> At the top, they will say that we need to be friends, that all peoples should be in peace and accord and so on. And below all the discussion will seem like provocations and confrontations.

Despite Demidov's protestations about recapturing nationalism from extremists, Nemtsov insisted that those who welcomed the Russkii Proekt were 'above all ultranationalists and fascists.'[102] No less alarmist was Sergei Mironov, the speaker of the Federation Council and the leader of the new leftist party, Spravedlivaya Rossiya ('Just Russia'), who condemned the Russkii Proekt as a Trojan Horse that could bring dangerous radicals into the Duma. Responding to this criticism, Demidov conceded that 'there are maniacs everywhere' and 'there is no great cause without rubbish.' But he insisted that Edinaya Rossiya would not welcome violent radicals, 'people with bricks.' Alluding to the fictional serial killer played by Anthony Hopkins in the movie, *The Silence of the Lambs*, he reassured the public that 'our party is not intended for political Dr. Lecters.'[103]

In fact, the Russkii Proekt offered numerous opportunities for 'political Dr. Lecters' from the violent, neo-Nazi fringes of Russian nationalism. Natal'ya Androsenko, the supervisor of the project's website, used links to extremists to demonstrate its authenticity as a nationalist platform. When the website went live on 16 May 2007, it featured a '*Russkaya* network': a list of nationalist sites whose posts would appear on its own news feed. Some of these partners were innocuous, but others represented racist or neo-fascist elements. The most notorious was *Rus' Pravoslavnaya* ('Orthodox Rus'), a self-styled 'anti-Semitic Black Hundreds newspaper of Russian nationalists.' It was edited by Konstantin Dushenov, who was facing prosecution for a notorious anti-Semitic film titled 'Russia with a knife in its back: Jewish fascism and the genocide of the Russian people.'[104] More respectable, but still controversial, was another partner, the journal *Zolotoi Lev*, which was known for anti-Semitic and racist articles.[105] No less problematic for a project ostensibly dedicated to moderate nationalism were the website's links to the Eurasian Youth Union and Eurasia movement. Both were vehicles for Aleksandr Dugin, one of the leading propagandists of European ultra-rightist ideas in post-Soviet Russia.[106]

Androsenko's cultivation of extremists was also evident in a section of the website titled 'people.' The first edition of the website featured an article by Andrei Morozov, a leader of the radical pro-Kremlin youth group, Krasnyi blitskrig (Red Blitzkrieg). Morozov was a notorious firebrand. A proponent of a Stalinist version of national-socialism, he had called repeatedly for the abandonment of non-violence as a means of political struggle.[107] On 21 August 2006, Krasnyi blitskrig had announced a 'Day of the Mortar' for vengeance against the liberals who were responsible for the defeat of the attempted anti-Gorbachev coup 15 years earlier.[108] Rhetorical extremism was soon matched by real action. In March 2007, three months before his appearance on the site of the Russkii Proekt, Morozov had fired shots at the office of Edinaya Rossiya on Moscow's Kutuzovskii Prospekt as retaliation for the arrest of one of his comrades, the neo-Nazi blogger Ol'ga Kas'yanenko ('Matilda Don').[109]

The presence of ultranationalists on the website became a minor scandal when SOVA Center, Russia's leading NGO specialising in the monitoring of ultranationalism, reported that the Russkii Proekt 'is advertising anti-Semites and racists.' SOVA singled out the journal *Zolotoi Lev*, which 'published articles written from a purely racist position' and which was 'headed by Andrei Savel'ev and Sergei Pykhtin, the leaders of the recently created ultra-right party Velikaya Rossiya.'[110] Savel'ev, a Duma deputy, retaliated with a complaint to the Prosecutor General's office. His long-winded statement quoted SOVA's allegations in a long list of other hostile utterances by 'scoundrels hired by the Kremlin.'[111] In a move that dramatised the way that 'managed nationalism' strengthened the position of radicals, the Prosecutor General ignored all of Savel'ev's detractors except for SOVA, which was faced with defamation proceedings.[112]

What escaped attention at the time was the involvement of Il'ya Goryachev in the Russkii Proekt. Under the pseudonym 'Ivan Arkanov' (an allusion to the Serbian paramilitary leader Arkan), Goryachev marked the launching of the project with an article in the nationalist newspaper *Russkii kur'er*. Unlike some of

his colleagues, Goryachev treated the Kremlin's new sensitivity to nationalist grievances as evidence of a contest in the corridors of power.

> On the one hand, the authorities are actively fighting against extremism, which is usually understood as Russian nationalism. On the other, there is another view on the national question present in the Presidential Administration. Declarations about the falling birth rate, the demographic catastrophe, and the necessity of the struggle against illegal immigration appear regularly.[113]

Goryachev also contributed to the Russkii Proekt's website. In one article that attracted the attention of human rights activists, he reflected on recent killings of ethnic Russians in Ingushetia and called for a 'consistent Russification of the Northern Caucasus' that would enable every Russian in the region to feel not like a member of a beleaguered minority but as a representative of a state-forming people.'[114]

Ultimately, Goryachev also played a significant organisational role in the Russkii Proekt. In his memoirs, he revealed that 'a comrade,' who had become one of the directors of the project, had invited him to monitor a subsidiary initiative, an ostensibly independent Russian Orthodox youth organisation called the 'Georgievtsy.'[115] This 'comrade' was undoubtedly Aleksei Mitryushin, the football gang leader and former Nashi functionary, who served as executive director of the Russkii Proekt.[116] Goryachev's employment began in May 2007, when he monitored one of the Georgievtsy's first public 'happenings,' a flash mob in Moscow's Old Square. The focus of the action was the chapel to the Heroes of the Battle of Plevna (1877), a great Russian victory during the Russo-Turkish War. Realising that the vicinity of chapel was a notorious meeting place for homosexuals, Goryachev proposed that the Georgievtsy establish an evening patrol of 'concerned citizens' to defend the integrity of 'this sacred site.'[117] Launched on the Day of Russia, June 12, this exercise in homophobia attracted favourable coverage in the mainstream media. *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, the pro-Kremlin tabloid where Russkii Obraz's Dmitrii Steshin was a celebrated war correspondent, promoted the action with a series of sympathetic articles about the Georgievtsy's struggle to clear the square of 'sexual demons.'[118] The first, titled 'How Orthodox Christians cured gays by words in Moscow,' attempted to make light of the matter by recounting how the paper sent a journalist pretending to be a homosexual to test the vigilance of the vigilantes.[119]

Like many other pro-Kremlin nationalist initiatives, the 'Georgievskii patrols' became a doorway for radical nationalists to enter public space. In an article published in *Russkii kur'er* under his pseudonym 'Ivan Arkanov,' Goryachev noted that the patrols were supported by 'a whole array of national-patriotic organisations,' which ranged from DPNI to the neo-Nazi Slavyanskii Soyuz.[120] Particularly active was the Russkii obshchenatsional'nyi soyuz (Russian All-National Union, RONS), a far-right organisation whose leader, Igor' Artemov, submitted a petition to the Mayor's office to clean up the square.[121] RONS was notorious for its violence against homosexuals. One year earlier, its skinhead militants, chanting 'Christ is Risen' and 'Sieg Heil!,' had staged coordinated attacks on Moscow gay clubs.[122]

The first four evenings of 'Georgievskii patrols' were uneventful, but on 16 June a group of unidentified men attacked the vigilantes, leaving five of them with minor injuries.[123] Nationalist circles insinuated that the attackers were hirelings of ethnic criminals whose male prostitution racket had been disrupted.[124] The allegation was reinforced the next day, when gas-pistol shots were fired from a passing car at the Georgievtsy.[125] The publicity around these skirmishes transformed the Plevna chapel into a focal point of tension between groups of Caucasians and Russian skinheads. On 22 June, the anniversary of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, the conflict escalated into a full-scale riot. In the afternoon, a large contingent of OMON troops had intervened to stop a brawl between gangs of Russian skinheads and Caucasian youths in Manezh Square. A hundred combatants soon reassembled on Old Square, where they clashed repeatedly over the course of several hours. The skinheads chanted 'Kondopoga!' – the scene of recent race riots – and 'Russia for the Russians, Moscow for Muscovites!' When the Caucasians began to retreat, the skinheads chased them to Kitaigorod passage, where the two groups were finally dispersed by the OMON. Some forty rioters were detained.[126]

In his memoir, Goryachev boasted that the Georgievtsy had won a kind of victory. Documentary evidence of a child prostitution ring in the square was compiled in a report that was submitted to the law enforcement organs as a parliamentary submission by Nikolai Kur'yanovich, the far-right Duma deputy. As a result, concluded Goryachev, the ring 'was annihilated, or more likely, it simply moved elsewhere.'[127]

More significant was the way that Goryachev had exploited 'managed nationalism' and the defence of 'traditional values' to gain access to public space. Under the shield of the Georgievtsy's patriotic vigil, nationalist militants had turned the Plevna monument in a rallying point. Only when riots broke out between skinheads and Caucasians did the security forces take action to restore order. This indulgence contrasted with the increasing restrictions on peaceful pro-democracy protest. In April 2007, the Moscow authorities had rejected an application by the Other Russia coalition to hold a Dissenters' March in the city centre. A massive contingent of OMON riot police and Interior Ministry forces were deployed to suppress those who defied the ban. At least 170 demonstrators were arrested, and dozens were beaten.[128] The next Dissenters' March in Moscow, held on 11 June on the eve of the Georgievskii vigils, was restricted to a gathering behind police cordons in Novopushkinskii Square. When the crowd refused to disperse, Garry Kasparov explained to the crowd that 'all the paths for the march are densely blocked, and the depraved regime is ready to use force.'[129] Already, some radical nationalists were encountering less resistance when they entered public spaces.

Khuk Sprava

Involvement in the 'preventive counter-revolution' did not temper the radicalism of Goryachev's circle. Indeed, while he and his comrades worked for *RE:aktsiya*, SPAS and the Russkii Proekt, they were simultaneously engaged on two endeavours that expanded the influence of Russkii Obraz in the far-right scene. One was

their work as parliamentary aides to Nikolai Kur'yanovich, the most extreme nationalist in the State Duma. The other was the far-right rock band, *Khuk Sprava* ('Hook from the Right'), which was promoted as 'The Voice of Russkii Obraz.' During 2006–9, this band expanded the organisation's reach far beyond the tertiary-educated audience of its highbrow journal. According to Il'ya Goryachev, the band was 'our basic instrument of propaganda.' It served the movement's goal of attracting youth because 'music and youth subcultures influence this milieu more than traditional political propaganda.' In particular, it was a way of winning converts in the football gang milieu, whose musical subculture was relatively undeveloped.[130] At the same time, *Khuk Sprava* played a crucial role in projecting the movement's radical image. It provided a platform for the expression of ideas and values that could not be stated in conventional political documents. In social terms, it helped to form a space in which the ultranationalist underground and subcultures mingled. It was also a source of income that could be used to fund both political activism and charitable support for imprisoned fighters.

Since its inception, Russkii Obraz had been closely linked to the far-right music subculture. One of its sources was 'Kolovrat Crew,' the support group of the neo-Nazi band *Kolovrat*. Each issue of *Russkii Obraz* journal had included reviews and discussion of white power bands from Russia and Europe. In 2005, the journal organised 'RO Fest,' a series of public concerts that reflected its effort to cultivate very different constituencies.[131] At one extreme, there was a performance by *Clockwork Times*, a band catering to football hooligans.[132] At the other, there was *Teodulija*, the Serbian ethno-folk ensemble, which attracted a crowd of families with children, military officers, journalists, and diplomats from the Serbian embassy.[133]

The success of RO Fest prepared the way for the creation of Russkii Obraz's own band. Its guiding spirit was Sergei Erzunov ('Oi-Ei'), a singer and songwriter, who had been a close friend of Nikita Tikhonov since their student days in the History Faculty of Moscow State University.[134] Erzunov was joined by another member of the group's inner circle, Andrei Gulyutin (nicknamed *Most*, 'Bridge'), who became drummer.[135] A member of the editorial committee of *Russkii Obraz* journal, Gulyutin would become a prominent far-right journalist.

Erzunov's band held its first rehearsal on 11 February 2006 and its first concert on 28 July that year at the 'Black and White' club.[136] Flaunting its radicalism, the band was originally named '282,' a reference to the article of the Criminal Code that outlawed the incitement of hatred and enmity on racial and other grounds. Some time afterwards, the band was rebranded as *Khuk Sprava*, 'hook from the right,' a boxing term which underlined its connection to skinhead aggression and far-right politics.

There is no doubt that the band's activities and the lyrics of its songs were followed closely by some influential figures in the neo-Nazi subculture. On a series of occasions, Goryachev was compelled to placate Sergei Golubev, the leader of the Russian affiliate of Blood & Honour/Combat 18, which tried to maintain a kind of protection racket over the neo-Nazi music scene. Sometimes Golubev's grievances were financial; at other times, he had an ideological axe to grind.[137]

What was clear was that he perceived *Khuk Sprava* as a threat to his sway over the far-right music scene.

During 2006–8, *Khuk Sprava* became the public face of Russkii Obraz. Its songs lent a kind of glamour and a public identity to the shadowy organisation. The band's concerts were major events on Russkii Obraz's calendar, and received detailed coverage on its website. Erzunov often appeared on stage in t-shirts featuring the movement's logo.[138] The identification was reinforced by the song 'We Are Russkii Obraz,' which was first performed 'with pathos and pride' at a concert at the Vermel' Club in October 2006 and became the movement's unofficial anthem.[139] At the same time, regional tours helped *Russkii Obraz* to build up a national network. Some concerts were timed to coincide with political actions. Others were combined with agitation.[140]

Despite the presence of ultranationalists in its audiences, *Khuk Sprava* did not flaunt its neo-Nazi sympathies. Its restraint contrasted with the excesses of the paradigmatic neo-Nazi band, *Kolovrat*, which displayed images of skinheads performing raised-arm salutes on its website and courted notoriety with overtly pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic lyrics. By contrast, *Khuk Sprava* confined itself to poetic allusions to the Nazi experience. One of the most obvious was the use of the German word 'Reich' in its song 'Polar Reich' (*Pol'yarnyi Reikh*), a fantasy about a coming utopia of racial solidarity and honour:

> There, far away, beyond the blue sea,
> Beyond the border of earthly delights,
> In spite and against, we will build
> Our and only our Polar Reich.
> Wind will tell you about it
> And the verses of songs will herald it.
> And if your soul is bright,
> You will join our squad by yourself.
> Let traitors rot with eyes closed, with a weak soul,
> Those who sell their Blood and Faith,
> Who have lived their lives like eternal slaves.
> I wait for an eclipse in minds.
> Let everyone's eyes bulge
> When, in the ice,
> Our and only our Polar Reich will rise![141]

To insiders, this song is an invitation to join the neo-Nazi underground and fight for that Reich against traitors 'who sell their Blood and Faith.' But to the uninitiated, the message is shrouded by poetic imagery and the romantic fantasy of an imagined polar kingdom.

One reason for this reticence was tactical. With good reason, *Khuk Sprava* feared losing access to performance venues. In October 2006, the club Vermel blacklisted the band because its song 'Generation of the 80s,' a lament about the chaos and national humiliation of the Soviet collapse, had provoked 'a forest' of

raised-arm, Nazi-style salutes at a concert. In the wake of this setback, Sergei Erzunov admonished the band's fans for their reckless enthusiasm:

> Every raised arm at a concert equals a ban on subsequent performances by the group at that establishment. This means a reduction in accessible places for performances, a certain reputation for the group, the unwillingness of management to put us on concert programmes; this means the repetition of the fate of tens of groups, which are 'closed,' which play in apartments and the basements of technical colleges. Do we really need this? Or do we need good concerts in open venues, a good time, and the status of an open group?[142]

To avoid a repetition of the Vermel debacle, *Khuk Sprava* refrained from renditions of 'Generation of the 80s' at venues where it hoped to perform again.[143]

The minimisation of Nazi references also reflected the logic of Russkii Obraz's propaganda strategy. In an interview recorded in 2010, Erzunov explained that he had deliberately avoided conventional neo-Nazi motifs like 'racial holy war' and 'Valkyries in the skies' because 'our aim was to play for everybody.' There was no place in the band's lyrics for the 'usual ideological schemes and stock phrases.' An average young Russian 'who is not involved in the movement' would not be inspired by songs about Hitler. 'That is one of the reasons,' added Erzunov, 'why the nationalists in Russia have limited support.' Instead of this fixation on an alien mythology, *Khuk Sprava* tried to inspire an apathetic generation by songs about 'the essential things in our lives such as Dignity, Honour, Honesty, Courage.'[144] Successful indoctrination could only take place in stages. Those 'involved in the movement' might be inspired by Hitler, but potential converts should be drawn in by an appeal to more traditional masculine attributes.

A preoccupation with those attributes runs like a thread through *Khuk Sprava*'s songs. The most important was 'honour' ('*chest*'), which could take both private and public forms. The song 'The Way of Honour' (*Doroga chesti*) extolled the nurturing of children:

> To cover your family and house by yourself — this is what will be called Honour.
> No idleness, no envy, no deception, but simple decent honest labour.
> … Preserve your Honour, preserve your Honour and tell your children to do so!
> To nurture children with love, they will appreciate and understand this.

The song extended the notion of home to include the nation:

> Always to rebuff enemies.
> And tear hundreds of pitiful chains apart.
> And this is what will be called Honour…
> Your native paternal bright land in times of misfortune and discord
> This is the only place you must call home.[145]

This patriotic exhortation reinforced Russkii Obraz's public campaigns for healthy lifestyles and contributed to the organisation's reputation for self-righteous moralising. It also sent a coded message, about the future of the white race and the paramilitary insurgency, to the militants of the neo-Nazi underground.

Many of *Khuk Sprava*'s songs counterposed the virtues of an active life to the vices of contemporary Russian youth. The song 'Blue Dope' (*Sinyaya Dur'*) warned about the dangers of alcoholism. Recounting a night of drunken revelry and bad behaviour followed by a painful hangover, it exhorted youth to spurn the 'poison' of alcohol and instead to embark on a life of action and procreation ('father children, nurture them!').[146]

Khuk Sprava's ethical exhortations were invariably connected to the struggle against racial outsiders. The refrain of 'I Call!' identified tolerance as a symptom of brainwashing. Racist and homophobic language was an assertion of freedom and strength:

> I call a faggot a faggot!
> I call a nigger a nigger!
> They haven't yet brainwashed me!
> To be tolerant is the choice of a loser![147]

A similar message was conveyed by 'The Grapes of Tolerance,' which recounted a visit to a market where the protagonist 'was acquainting myself with the culture of the guests of Moscow.' After being overcharged everywhere, he vows to avoid the markets and to exact an unspecified vengeance. The song ends with the menacing words, 'I am coming harshly to teach you.'[148]

No less inflammatory was 'The Blood of Kondopoga,' which celebrated the anti-Caucasian riots of August 2006:

> In the North, calamity is knocking at the door,
> It splatters with Russian Blood.
> You idler, open war is at your bedhead!
> We need each Russian man and August is only the beginning.
> Are you accustomed to shutting your eyes under a soft blanket?
> By each doing his share, the numberless hostile pack should be repelled.
> Does your quiet courtyard really smell of paradise?
> Everywhere, always, on every front, you must defend your home.
> In apartment stairwells, in offices, in minds,
> A bloody conflict has erupted.
> One must not stay neutral when one's brothers are being stabbed.
> We live our life like a war,
> A cruel and inevitable one,
> Those who have risen from sleep
> Are of a small number still,
> But let the eyes of everyone,
> Be washed by the Blood of Russian Kondopoga,
> The Blood of Russian Kondopoga![149]

This call to arms verges on incitement to racial violence. The outsiders are already within the gates, and 'each Russian man' (literally 'each Russian bayonet') should be ready to repel them from the spaces of everyday life.

A similar exhortation resounded in 'Russian Beauty,' whose protagonist vows to protect a blonde-haired woman against dark-skinned visitors from the Caucasus. This action was explicitly presented as part of a struggle for the proliferation of the white race.

> I will not let a black southerner abuse you for his pleasure
> No, a stranger from the Caucasus will not exercise power over you!
> No, a black-skinned [*chernomazyi*] stranger will not grasp your dark-blonde locks!
> I will defend the Russian Beauty; the enemy will not touch you!
> If we stand up for Russian pride, we will defend the honour of white women!
> The dark-blonde maiden will become a mother,
> There will be numberless white children![150]

The same anxieties about miscegenation and rapacious outsiders pervaded the song 'Indifference,' which castigates bystanders who lack the will to fight when confronted by the spectacle of 'a drunk "visitor" grabbing someone's daughter.'[151] The lyrics of 'Black-White Regime' appeared to argue for moral clarity, but the racial sub-text was transparent:

> The black, the evil is passing through your brain
> The foreignness is capturing you…
> A mixed palette does not attract you
> Defend yourself with a solid wall, blood brother! …
> Let us swear to serve the White![152]

Other songs celebrated the male aggression that was central to the skinhead experience. 'Fight club' was a kind of skinhead anthem. Opening with teeth being knocked out and fists being bruised, it boasted that 'our male blood is boiling' and recalled victories in fights where 'punches draw blood.' The moral was that 'those who have opened their eyes to the light have found the answer in violence.'[153]

The valorisation of violence was reinforced by the denigration of mercy and compassion. The message of 'General Ermolov,' a paean to the nineteenth century general who waged a brutal pacification campaign in the Caucasus, was that his Chechen enemies were animals, not human beings, and should be treated accordingly:

> 'No pampering,' the general said.
> 'This is not for what I came to these mountains.
> If you feed the wolf with your fingers,
> regiments of them will come down from the ridges of Caucasus.'

By bullets and fortresses, Ermolov ensured that 'Great Rus' was respected.

> His name sounded with fear in the mountains,
> all paths were open to Russian boots.
> He did not allow the weakness of clemency,
> and he ruled the wolf as the wolf, with wisdom.

The song concluded by drawing a lesson for the present:

> … Many years have passed; the general is dead.
> Many things that he devised are forgotten.
> We weakened when we needed force
> and we let wolves into Russian territory.
> The black-eyed beast is baring his teeth.
> There are no Russian generals anymore.
> But we ardently believe his words.
> He who weakens will lose to the wolf.[154]

Given Russkii Obraz's proximity to the neo-Nazi underground, these lines can only be understood as an endorsement of the racist killings committed by skinhead gangs against the 'wolves,' the non-Slavic immigrants and guest workers in Russian cities.

Khuk Sprava played a crucial role in Russkii Obraz's transformation from a private club into a political force. Lenin's dictum about the revolutionary role of newspapers in the early 1900s might be applied to the rock bands of militant subcultures a century later. A band is 'not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser.'[155] Khuk Sprava became a collective propagandist because it expressed many of Russkii Obraz's central tenets about national degradation, about the evils of tolerance, about the primacy of race and biology, and about the necessity of violence. It was a collective agitator because it could be deployed to amplify the message of a campaign, to supplement orators at rallies, and to increase crowds at major events. And it was a collective organiser because its performances drew a stream of militants into the orbit of Russkii Obraz and helped to maintain a kind of community around the organisation. Unlike a newspaper, Khuk Sprava also had the advantage that it could articulate dangerous ideas in lyrics that might be excused as artistic fantasy. If the band's songs about honour and healthy lifestyles prefigure Russkii Obraz's public campaigns during 2008–9, its songs about racial violence were a warning that terror was on the way.

Kuryanovich Crew

While Khuk Sprava built up Russkii Obraz's following in the far-right musical subculture, Goryachev and two members of his circle were engaged in a second vector of activism. During 2005–7, they worked as parliamentary aides to Nikolai

Kur'yanovich, a deputy from Vladimir Zhirinovskii's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR). Even by the standards of the Fourth Duma, which included a large cohort of nationalists from the Rodina bloc, Kur'yanovich was an extreme figure. No other deputy rivalled his penchant for raised-arm salutes and his support for neo-Nazi skinheads. One measure of his extremism was his expulsion in late 2006 from the LDPR, a party that had long been a haven for radical nationalists. In the Duma, Kur'yanovich became a kind of parliamentary patron of the neo-Nazi underground and a mentor to neo-Nazi activists like Goryachev. Working for Kur'yanovich provided key figures in Russkii Obraz with an opportunity to learn about the state apparatus and how it might be used to advance their cause, both by obstructing repression and by opening public platforms to their comrades. It also brought them into contact with the elite of nationalist politics.

Kur'yanovich was not the first radical nationalist from Siberia to enter the Duma on the LDPR lists. The far-right SPAS bloc, which had been barred from running in the 1999 elections, was the brainchild of two LDPR deputies from the region. Kur'yanovich had served his political apprenticeship in the LDPR's Irkutsk branch. He won the local Duma seat in December 2003 after a campaign that played upon popular fears about Chinese immigration into Siberia.[156] The timing of his arrival in the Duma was auspicious. Il'ya Goryachev and Nikita Tikhonov had just conducted a very similar campaign for Boris Fedorov in Moscow, but their candidate had not been elected. Kur'yanovich provided the young men of Russkii Obraz with a new stepping stone into the arena of parliamentary politics.

In many ways, Kur'yanovich was the ideal mentor. Unlike Fedorov, Kur'yanovich inhabited the same sub-cultural milieu and shared many of the ideological assumptions of Russkii Obraz. The shaven-headed deputy was well-known in skinhead circles. According to Dmitrii Rogozin, Kur'yanovich was 'an unusual figure' who was 'an experienced street fighter and he has experience of parliamentary struggle.'[157] Kur'yanovich was also an overt racist. He was notorious for a misogynist obsession with the protection of the national gene pool. In June 2005, he proposed legislation that would revoke the citizenship of Russian women who married foreigners.[158] 'Our women, the most beautiful and best in the world,' he lamented, 'are going abroad, and in the process are bargaining away the most valuable thing we have, the gene pool of our people.'[159] Several months later, he supplemented the marriage ban with a proposal to prohibit women under 21 years of age from travelling overseas, unless accompanied by a man.[160] The legislation was rejected at the committee stage, but it established Kur'yanovich's reputation as the leading voice of racist nationalism in the Duma.[161]

Even within the LDPR, Kur'yanovich was an extreme figure. By his own admission, none of his party colleagues shared his radical convictions. For support, he relied on a team of young parliamentary aides, whom he dubbed the 'Kuryanovich Crew,' an allusion to the 'Kolovrat Crew,' one of the sources of Russkii Obraz. In an interview, Kur'yanovich boasted that 'we effectively interact with a pool of patriotically inclined journalists, various public organisations, like DPNI, RONS, ROD, Russkii Obraz and others.'[162] Prominent in the 'Kuryanovich Crew' were several key figures in Russkii Obraz and its broader networks: Il'ya Goryachev, Evgenii Valyaev, Mikhail Valyaev, and Aleksei Baranovskii.[163]

With the help of his 'Crew,' Kur'yanovich became a kind of parliamentary patron for Russia's skinheads, whom he publicly extolled as a 'useful organisation.'[164] The connection attracted media attention in September 2006, when a member of the 'Crew,' Evgenii Valyaev, led a group of skinhead fighters into Pushkin Square. Their target was a small crowd of leftists, mainly members of Nikolai Khramov's Russian Radicals, who were demonstrating against religious indoctrination in schools. Screaming, 'Liberals get out of Russia!' and 'Hitler, Nation, Order!' the skinheads performed raised-arm salutes, tore down anti-religious placards, and threatened to beat up the demonstrators.[165] As soon as police appeared, the skinheads dispersed, and, as the newspaper *Moskovskii komsomolets* reported, 'with them fled a certain Evgenii Valyaev, a young comrade of Nikolai Kur'yanovich, the Duma deputy from the LDPR.'[166]

The most important contribution of the 'Kur'yanovich Crew' to the ultranationalist cause was the use of the deputy's official status to obstruct the prosecution of far-right propaganda outlets and of skinheads accused of violent crimes.[167] On the one hand, the Crew regularly interceded on behalf of detained militants. The advantage, for Russkii Obraz, was to expand its network of contacts amongst the most extreme elements in the nationalist milieu: those who were engaged in illegal acts. This process was exemplified by the case of Roman Zheleznov ('Zukhel'), a young neo-Nazi who headed Anti-Antifa, a groupuscule that harassed anti-fascist activists. In December 2006, Zheleznov was arrested by police on suspicion of organising an explosion in the basement of the apartment building of the administrator of an anti-fascist website.[168] According to Zheleznov, he was tortured in the police station for several days before the Valyaev brothers took up the case and Kur'yanovich secured his release.[169] Several months later, Evgenii Valyaev arranged for Zheleznov to meet Il'ya Goryachev for a discussion about providing his rescuers with personal data about Antifa activists.[170]

The Kur'yanovich Crew also tried to defend Nikita Tikhonov, who had gone into hiding to evade arrest for the murder of Aleksandr Ryukhin. During 2007, the trial of the three arrested suspects in the crime became a test of strength between the friends and foes of the neo-Nazi movement. On the one side was Stanislav Markelov, the human rights lawyer and Antifa activist, who represented Egor Tomskii, a survivor of the attack. Both in the courtroom and in a series of press conferences, Markelov campaigned tirelessly to keep the case in the public eye. He protested vociferously when the proceedings were split into two separate prosecutions, which enabled a reduction in the charges against three detainees from murder to hooliganism and the intentional infliction of minor bodily harm.[171] On the other side was Kur'yanovich. In a letter to the court, which was read out during the proceedings, the deputy offered bail for the defendants.[172] Ultimately Shitov, Antsiferov, and Reutskii were sentenced to four, five, and six years of imprisonment respectively. The murder charges remained in force against Tikhonov and Parinov.[173]

Kur'yanovich also tried to educate militants about strategems to avoid repression. In March 2006, in the wake of prosecutions of ultranationalists in Kaliningrad and Astrakhan under Article 282 of the Criminal Code, he exhorted his 'co-fighters' to dispose of publications and documents that might serve as

evidence in a criminal case. 'Put everything on compact discs,' he recommended, 'and hide it far from your place of residence.' He also warned militants against discussing planned actions on mobile phones and email servers based in Russia.[174]

Kur'yanovich repeatedly used his official status to usher radical nationalist crowds into the public arena. On one occasion, he prevented the dispersal of militants outside the State Duma by reassuring police that he was merely conducting a meeting with his constituents.[175] On another, he invited members of Slavyanskii Soyuz ('Slavic Union,' SS), the neo-Nazi gang headed by Dmitrii Demushkin, to a ceremony at which he awarded them a certificate in recognition of the efforts of their hackers to disable 'Russophobic' websites including those of the Moscow Helsinki Group and the World Congress of Russian Jewry.[176] Kur'yanovich also arranged for Demushkin to address his LDPR party colleagues on 'youth policy.' Soon afterwards, a video of the discussion appeared on the internet, where Kur'yanovich lavished praise on skinheads and joined Demushkin in raised-arm salutes.[177]

The Right March

It was not, however, Kur'yanovich, but a pro-Kremlin formation that was responsible for the first major breakthrough of radical nationalist crowds into public space. The pretext was the new Day of National Unity, a public holiday that marked the anniversary of the expulsion of Polish occupiers from the Kremlin in 1612. Amongst the commemorations held on the day was a 'Right March,' which was instigated by Aleksandr Dugin's' Eurasian Youth Union (ESM), a pro-Kremlin youth organisation that claimed to be the heirs of the *Oprichniki*, Ivan the Terrible's secret police.[178] Like Nashi, the 'Right March' exemplified the way that the 'preventive counter-revolution' created opportunities for radical nationalists. The march was authorised because an application had been submitted by Kremlin-approved militants from ESM. The problem was that ESM's strategy was to mobilise hardened fighters from ultra-nationalist subcultures as a counter-revolutionary force. On at least one occasion, this strategy worked. In April 2005, the ESM dispersed anti-government protests in Ufa, the capital of Bashkiriya. Under the watchful eye of local police, a force of some 400 fighters from the ultra-nationalist group 'Grey Wolves' attacked a small crowd of rights-defenders and communists and cleared the square.[179] Emboldened by this victory, Dugin held a press conference in September to announce a project to mobilise far-right militants across the former Soviet space. According to him, 'nationalists of different ethnic groups understood that in isolation they could do nothing to oppose the orange threat.' Hence they were uniting in a 'Youth Anti-Orangist Front,' whose members included the Grey Wolves (Bashkiriya), Dmitro Korchinskii's Bratstvo (Ukraine), and Azatlyk movement (Tatarstan).[180]

From the outset, it was clear that the ESM would have difficulties controlling its ultra-nationalist auxiliaries at the 'Right March.' A rival application to hold a parade, at the same place and the same time, had been submitted by 'a group of Russian citizens.' A front for the DPNI, this group was headed by Aleksei Mikhailov, a coordinator of DPNI's Moscow branch and a future leader of

Russkii Obraz. While ESM's application promised a demonstration of the unity of Russian ultra-rightists and the regime in a joint struggle against 'Atlanticism,' Mikhailov's group was focused on the internal enemy, the illegal immigrants who were conducting a 'creeping occupation.'[181] Although the Moscow Prefecture ruled in favour of ESM's application, Mikhailov's group were in a strong position. Despite its pretensions to unite militants across the former Soviet space, the ESM had a tiny membership. Only by attracting other groups could it create the illusion of mass support. At a series of preparatory meetings for the Right March, ESM attempted to set limits to the behaviour of its nationalist collaborators. Valerii Korovin, a leader of ESM, warned that there could be no Nazi symbols, no raised armed salutes, no violence, and no anti-Semitism.[182]

What is clear is that the Right March was a triumph for DPNI and a humiliation for ESM. Lacking enough supporters to carry their own banners, the ESM leaders had to beg for help from football hooligans.[183] Even with these recruits, the ESM contingent numbered barely one hundred.[184] It was dwarfed by the large crowd, estimated at 4,000, of skinheads, football gang members, and neo-Nazi militants. Despite Korovin's exhortations, the march saw repeated raised-arm salutes, football chants suggestive of 'Sieg Heil,' and the slogan 'Russia for the Russians.' At the concluding rally in Slavyanskaya Square, the ESM's loyalist, anti-Orangist message was submerged by a flood of anti-Kremlin ethnonationalist invective. The tone was set by Nikolai Kur'yanovich, the only Duma deputy to address the crowd, who declared that 'the country is being ruled by national-traitors [national-predateli], whom we call enemies of the people.'[185] In an effort to remind speakers of the purpose of the rally, the ESM's Pavel Zarifullin introduced the nationalist intellectual Konstantin Krylov as 'our Eurasianist machine-gun, whose every word will strike America.' These words fell on deaf ears. Like other speakers, Krylov ignored his host and proceeded to draw a parallel between the degradation of the Russian state under Putin and during the Time of Troubles.[186] This argument was elaborated in a fiery address by the DPNI's Aleksandr Belov (Potkin), who lambasted the Kremlin's failure to defend Russia against the onslaught of illegal immigrants and the narcotics trade.[187] In a provocative move, he exhorted the crowd to show their support of his anti-immigrant message by raising their right hands. The overwhelming majority responded with Nazi-style salutes and the old RNE chant, 'Glory to Russia!'[188]

This display of uncontrolled far-right fury in the centre of Moscow was a major embarrassment for ESM. At first, Dugin seemed unaware of the scale of the debacle. At a public debate, he portrayed the Right March as a festival of internationalism before being forced to admit that he had not attended it.[189] Faced with a storm of criticism, both in the media and from politicians, Zarifullin blamed Dmitrii Demushkin's neo-Nazi Slavyanskii Soyuz for staging a 'fascist provocation.'[190] Behind the scenes, activists who were to play a central role in Russkii Obraz helped to instigate that 'provocation.' The most important was Aleksei Mikhailov, but others were also deeply involved. Evgenii Valyaev, a member of the Kur'yanovich Crew, was sufficiently prominent for him to claim to have been both a participant and organiser.[191] Il'ya Goryachev was certainly present at the march. He used the occasion to expand his network of rightist acquaintances.

Among those he encountered for the first time was Konstantin Sapozhnikov, the future leader of Russkii Obraz's Kaluga branch.[192] For all of them, the Right March dramatised the political opportunities created by the Kremlin's counter-revolutionary mobilisation.

Kondopoga and the end of the Kur'yanovich Crew

The success of the Right March was followed by the launching of formal cooperation between Kur'yanovich and Russkii Obraz. The pretext was the arrest of General Ratko Mladić, the Bosnian Serb general indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) for his role in the Srebrenica massacre. On 1 March 2006 Kur'yanovich signed an 'Appeal to the Serbian people' drafted by Russkii Obraz. It celebrated the battlegrounds of the Yugoslav civil war as sites of moral edification: 'For us, Sarajevo, Vukovar, Krajina, and Kosovo have become symbols of an unshakeable tenacity and faithfulness to one's people, one's faith, one's Motherland.' The ICTY was 'just as legitimate as any group of terrorists arbitrarily passing judgement on innocent citizens.' Those innocents included Mladić, 'another hero of the Serb lands,' who had been betrayed by his own government.[193]

Kur'yanovich's assistance lent credibility to Russkii Obraz's engagement with Serbian officialdom. In September 2006, Kur'yanovich headed a Russkii Obraz delegation on a fact-finding tour of Serbia and Republika Srpska (Bosnia). The itinerary included consultations with prominent Serbian politicians, ideologues, and former paramilitary fighters. In Republika Srpska, Kur'yanovich signed a declaration on cooperation with Serbian coalition parties, was feted by the local business elite, and interviewed on local television. In Belgrade, the delegation was received by Tomislav Nikolić, the leader of the Serbian Radical Party and the future president of Serbia. Kur'yanovich also held talks with Borislav Pelević, the leader of the Party of Serbian Unity, which had been created by one of Russkii Obraz's idols, the gangster and paramilitary leader Arkan. In a press release, Russkii Obraz boasted about Pelević's connection to Arkan, whom it extolled as a 'Serbian national hero.'[194]

While Kur'yanovich was touring the Balkans, the dangers of radical nationalism at home were dramatised by race riots in the Karelian town of Kondopoga.[195] The spark was a fight in the Chaika restaurant on the night of 30 August. A group of Slavic men, some with criminal records, were taunting the Azerbaijani barman, who retaliated by summoning Chechen friends. Armed with knives and baseball bats, they arrived in three cars. By the time they had finished, three of the Slavs were dead, and five were hospitalised.[196] The killings were followed by days of rising tension. On 2 September, rioters took over the streets, setting fire to the restaurant and other businesses belonging to Caucasians. Seizing the opportunity, Kur'yanovich appointed Aleksandr Belov, the leader of the Movement against Illegal Immigration (DPNI), as his personal representative, a credential that made it harder for the local authorities to obstruct his public appearances in the town. According to Kur'yanovich, Belov 'kept me informed me about the situation, collected claims and petitions from citizens, and helped citizens to organise a

people's assembly, where citizens formulated proposals about the fate of the Chechen criminals.'[197] Belov's role in fomenting unrest provoked criticism from the local Duma deputy, Valentina Pivnenko. An interparty delegation, headed by Duma vice-speaker Vladimir Pekhtin, also drew attention to the LDPR's involvement in the upheaval.[198]

In the wake of Kondopoga, Kur'yanovich confirmed his position in nationalist politics by playing a central role in the first 'Russian March.' Unlike the previous year's Rightist March, the Russian March of 2006 was intended from the outset to be a rally of opposition nationalists. Describing the event as 'a protest against the humiliation of the indigenous population of the country,' Kur'yanovich lambasted those who sought to ban it as 'enemies of the people' who could one day expect 'severe punishment, including criminal prosecution.'[199]

Kur'yanovich Crew undoubtedly benefitted from Kur'yanovich's central role in the preparations for the march. For some time, the contact telephone number for the organising committee was Kur'yanovich's reception office in the Duma.[200] Apart from Kur'yanovich, the sessions of the organising committee were attended by three standard bearers of the defunct Rodina party: Dmitrii Rogozin, Andrei Savel'ev, and Viktor Alksnis. All were to play a role in the subsequent history of Russkii Obraz.[201]

Kur'yanovich paid a price for his outspoken support of the Kondopoga rioters and the mobilisation of nationalist street protest. On 31 October, five days before the Russian March, he was expelled from the LDPR. Declaring that 'our patience has burst,' LDPR leader Vladimir Zhirinovskii accused the renegade deputy of sabotaging the party's work while pursuing his own agenda. The last straw was the Russian March. Instead of joining the LDPR demonstration for the Day of National Unity, Kur'yanovich 'was conducting his own meeting with extremist organisations,' with which 'he was in constant contact.'[202] Kur'yanovich retorted that the LDPR had expelled him for his 'implacable position in defence of the Russian people' and that the party had discredited itself 'by excluding me from its ranks.'[203] It had also put an end to Kur'yanovich's parliamentary career. As a result, Russkii Obraz's access to the corridors of power was in doubt.

Velikaya Rossiya

The first attempt by radical nationalists to retain a foothold in the Duma was Velikaya Rossiya ('Great Russia'), a party that was created by the coalition of Rodina politicians and DPNI militants that had coalesced at the 2006 Russian March. To facilitate the party's registration, Velikaya Rossiya's programme copied that of Spravedlivaya Rossiya (Just Russia), the new Kremlin-backed moderate leftist party.[204] Another concession was the exclusion of politicians who had earned the Kremlin's hostility. Neither Dmitrii Rogozin nor Aleksandr Belov nor Nikolai Kur'yanovich were included in the presidium of the new party. Velikaya Rossiya was formally headed by Andrei Savel'ev, a Duma deputy and a nationalist ideologue.

Behind its anodyne facade, Velikaya Rossiya made no secret of its radical nationalist sympathies. It was that clear that Savel'ev served as a kind of

placeholder for Dmitrii Rogozin, who was regularly identified as the party's 'informal leader.' After his 'Orangist' rhetoric as leader of Rodina in 2005 and his involvement in the first Russian march in 2006, Rogozin had become a symbol of the threat of nationalist street protest. On one occasion, he had boasted about 'Scenario B,' the course of action that would be pursued if the authorities refused to register Velikaya Rossiya.[205] What lent credibility to this threat was the presence of radical militants of DPNI in the new party. The party website regularly published news items about DPNI actions.[206] Both Savel'ev and Rogozin attended the conference of DPNI's Moscow branch in March 2007. Savel'ev used the opportunity to exhort his audience to join Velikaya Rossiya. The same point was made more obliquely by Rogozin, who declared that the goal of 'We Russian nationalists' was to show that they were a third political force, a rival of the left-liberal coalition in Drugaya Rossiya and the opportunists of Edinaya Rossiya.[207]

Russkii Obraz militants played a significant role in Velikaya Rossiya. In his prison writings, Goryachev recalled that 'in the spring of 2007, my comrades and I were actively engaged in public activity in the framework of Dmitrii Rogozin's Congress of Russian Communities.' Their principal preoccupation was 'the creation of a party with the working name of Velikaya Rossiya.'[208] To promote the new party, members of Russkii Obraz exploited their positions in the media. Without disclosing his links to the party, Goryachev used a pseudonymous article in *Russkii kur'er* about the rise of political blogging to advertise Savel'ev's use of his new blog to launch a competition for a symbol for Velikaya Rossiya.[209] In the same newspaper, Dmitrii Taratorin conducted a long interview with Savel'ev in which both hinted at their radical ambitions. On the one hand, Taratorin observed that 'in ancient times, power was considered the prerogative of a caste of warriors,' an idea that would become an integral part of Russkii Obraz's official programme. On the other, Savel'ev echoed far-right apocalypticism when he explained that the purpose of Velikaya Rossiya was not to participate in the legislative process but to prepare for the power struggle that would accompany the impending breakdown of the Russian state.[210]

Goryachev and his friends benefitted on several levels from their involvement with Velikaya Rossiya. They expanded their network amongst both the elite of nationalist politics and the grassroots. They also developed projects that would eventually become part of its own repertoire. To dramatise the seriousness of Velikaya Rossiya's concern with Russia's declining population, Goryachev's group devised a new web site, 'Russkaya demografiya.' Emblazoned with the party's logo, the site was launched on 1 June 2007, the Day for the Defence of Children.[211] Ultimately this project became one of the core initiatives of Russkii Obraz as it emerged as a public organisation in 2008.

Despite its formal concessions to the rules of managed democracy, Velikaya Rossiya became a target of growing official hostility. Soon after Rogozin's musings about 'Scenario B,' an LDPR deputy alleged that 'B' was a reference to the exiled oligarch Boris Berezovskii. The Prosecutor's Office promptly launched an investigation of Velikaya Rossiya's finances.[212] This vigilance reflected official concern both about the party's electoral potential and its capacity to instigate unrest.

According to one expert, the new party might win 17–20% of the vote in a free election.[213] At the same time, it threatened the stability of the new Kremlin-backed left-wing party, Spravedlivaya Rossiya (SR), whose entire Voronezh branch had defected to Velikaya Rossiya in June 2007.[214] No less serious was the potential of the new party as a catalyst of mass disorders. Boris Makarenko, a pro-Kremlin political technologist, suggested that this 'party of nationalist hooligans' threatened to infect the entire election campaign with nationalist discourse and create 'a risk of a nationwide Kondopoga.'[215] Few commentators expressed surprise when the electoral commission refused to register Velikaya Rossiya. On 24 July 2007, it ruled that the party had failed to reach the required threshold of 50,000 members.[216] Three months later, the party's unofficial leader, Dmitrii Rogozin, accepted appointment as Russia's ambassador to NATO. The post offered opportunities for patriotic posturing but, as Rogozin publicly conceded, it also required silence about Russia's internal politics.[217]

After the demise of Velikaya Rossiya, Russkii Obraz activists shifted their attention to Narodnyi Soyuz (Popular Union), the last remnant of the Rodina bloc in the State Duma. Headed by the veteran red-brown leader Sergei Baburin, NS had carefully avoided confrontation with the Kremlin. In 2005, when Rogozin hinted at the possibility of an 'Orangist' scenario by changing the party colours to 'lemon-yellow,' Baburin signalled his loyalty by denouncing those who 'are preparing a revolution for us.'[218] His anti-revolutionary stance earned NS preferential treatment and the distrust of some more radical figures.

During 2006–7, Goryachev and several comrades served on NS's Political Council.[219] Involvement with a registered political party, led by veteran politicians, offered Russkii Obraz an opportunity to gain entry into an influential segment of the nationalist elite. They used their position to lobby for Kur'yanovich's nomination to third place on NS's list of candidates for the Duma elections, behind the party leader Baburin and another veteran of the red-brown opposition of 1990s, Viktor Alksnis. According to Goryachev, the idea was vetoed by the Presidential Administration. In Kur'yanovich's place, Goryachev's group proposed another influential ally, Aleksandr Batanov, the director of the Russian Orthodox television station SPAS.[220] His nomination was confirmed at a congress on 20 September. In a display of Russkii Obraz's influence in the party, the audience paid little attention to the announcement of Baburin and Alksnis' candidatures, but responded to Batanov's name with thunderous applause.[221] What attracted less attention at the time was the nomination of Dmitrii Taratorin and Mikhail Valyaev, both major figures in Russkii Obraz, on NS's regional lists for the elections.[222]

Their parliamentary aspirations were dashed by the Kremlin. Baburin was invited to a meeting with Vladislav Surkov, the deputy head of the Presidential Administration, who advised him to merge his party into Patriots of Russia (Patrioty Rossii), a loyalist project that had emerged from a Kremlin-instigated split in the Communist Party (KPRF) in 2004.[223] As a legal party, Patrioty Rossii had attracted the interest of some nationalists, including the leaders of Velikaya Rossiya. But Patrioty Rossii was clearly intended to play the role of a spoiler, which would draw votes from the KPRF but fail to win its own seats in the

Duma. Despite Rogozin's attendance at Patrioty Rossii's pre-election congress in September 2007, his name did not appear on the party lists. It was rumoured that his nomination had been vetoed by the Kremlin.[224]

Baburin's rejection of Surkov's proposal sealed the fate of NS. According to Goryachev, the party's neutralisation was entrusted to the Presidential Administration's internal department.[225] On 28 October, five weeks before the poll, the Central Electoral Commission disqualified NS on the pretext that 8.9% of the 200,000 signatures on its application were fraudulent.[226] Nevertheless, Russkii Obraz's audacious bid for a place in the Duma had brought its leaders to the forefront of nationalist politics and shown that they were treated seriously by the nationalist elite.

Conclusion

Putin's 'preventive counter-revolution' transformed Russia's political landscape. It made and unmade parties. It boosted the careers of a phalanx of Kremlin-aligned politicians, public intellectuals, and civic activists, and it drove others to the margins. It altered the balance of power between the state and civil society. Many of the fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution were nullified in practice. In sum these changes, as Ivan Krastev has observed, amounted to nothing less than regime change in Russia.[227]

The young militants of Russkii Obraz experienced both the costs and the benefits of this regime change. At close hand, they saw how the Kremlin unleashed the power of the state to purge the political landscape. First, they lost their foothold in the Duma when Kur'yanovich's career as a Duma deputy was brought to an ignominious end. Then they pinned their hopes on two parties, Velikaya Rossiya and NS, which were barred in rapid succession from competing in the elections.

Despite these setbacks, Russkii Obraz was strengthened by the reordering of Russian politics. Its leaders acquired experience and contacts through their work for *RE:aktsiya*, SPAS, and the Russkii Proekt. Few other representatives of the far right were so skilled at manipulating the regime's anti-Orangist propaganda. None enjoyed such close contacts with the curators of the Kremlin's surrogates, the youth organisations that had been mobilised to confront the revolutionary menace. Goryachev and his comrades also benefitted from the disruption of the established structures of nationalist politics. By the time of Dmitrii Medvedev's inauguration as president, there was a vacuum on the far-right of the political spectrum. Russkii Obraz had a plan to fill it.

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4 The attack on Orangist nationalism

> The Russian March can be regarded as an extended hand of friendship from nationalists to the regime.
>
> – Dmitrii Taratorin at a press conference explaining Russkii Obraz's stance on the 2008 Russian March[1]

> Our main enemy is not the alien occupiers, but the traitors of the race and the nation, who are ruling the country. Without treason by those in power, [foreign] occupation would not have been possible.
>
> – Nikita Tikhonov, Strategy 2020[2]

The inauguration of President Dmitrii Medvedev on 7 May 2008 was no cause for celebration amongst Russian nationalists. The carefully manipulated election cycle of 2007–8 had wiped out Russian nationalism as a force in systemic politics. None of the parliamentary standard bearers of radical nationalism – Dmitrii Rogozin, Andrei Savel'ev, Sergei Baburin, and Nikolai Kur'yanovich – were re-elected to the Fifth Duma. At the same time, United Russia's effort to co-opt Russian nationalism was quickly wound down in the aftermath of victory. Funding for Russkii Proekt ceased in February 2008, when its website stopped posting new materials.[3] The impact of these blows was compounded by the new president's ostentatiously liberal rhetoric about protecting civil freedom and confronting legal nihilism. This rhetoric, which kindled the optimism of some prominent pro-democracy activists, obscured the fact that real power remained in the hands of Vladimir Putin, now prime minister.[4]

Despite this hostile environment, the early years of the Medvedev-Putin 'tandemocracy' were the heyday of Russkii Obraz. During the second half of 2008, Goryachev and his comrades emerged from the shadows of the far-right subculture to become the leaders of a public organisation. Russkii Obraz became first a participant and then an official organiser of major nationalist rallies. Thanks to its sophisticated, regularly updated website, and a plethora of LiveJournal blogs, Russkii Obraz also became a ubiquitous presence on the nationalist internet. By the summer of 2009, it was a force to be reckoned with in nationalist politics. It claimed ten branches in major cities.[5] It sponsored a plethora of subsidiary 'projects,' civil society structures engaged in campaigns around imprisoned rightists,

immigration, unhealthy lifestyles, and demographic decline. It played a central organising role in the 'legal' Russian March of 2008.

This chapter shows how this transformation was made possible by the Kremlin's fear of a nascent 'Orangist' alliance of radical nationalists, led by Aleksandr Belov (Potkin) of DPNI, and national liberals, led by Aleksei Naval'nyi of the Narod ('People') movement. To neutralise this threat, Russkii Obraz was used as a 'spoiler' against DPNI. On the one hand, it fomented a schism within DPNI between Belov's 'Orangists' and a pro-Kremlin faction led by Russkii Obraz militants. On the other, Russkii Obraz cooperated closely with the Presidential Administration and pro-Kremlin youth organisations in its effort to take over the DPNI's agenda and co-opt its support base. In the summer of 2008, Goryachev developed a close alliance with Rossiya Molodaya (RuMol, Young Russia), a pro-Kremlin youth organisation headed by Maksim Mishchenko, a Duma deputy from United Russia. Mishchenko gave Russkii Obraz what its rivals lacked: a voice in the legislature, an interlocutor with state functionaries, and a kind of official patron who confirmed the systemic status of his clients.

What was paradoxical about this collusion was that it coincided with the radicalisation of Russkii Obraz. Once inchoate and allusive, the organisation's neo-Nazi ideology was codified in manifestoes and programmatic documents during 2008–9. At the same time, Russkii Obraz came out in support of the neo-Nazi underground with a propagandist documentary film and fund-raising events for imprisoned fighters. This alignment was underlined by the 'Ethical Codex,' an exhortation to the nationalist milieu that was signed jointly by Russkii Obraz and two notorious neo-Nazi gangs, Blood and Honour/Combat 18 and OB-88. Behind the scenes, Goryachev and members of his circle were closely involved with BORN, the neo-Nazi terrorist group led by Nikita Tikhonov, the co-founder of the movement's original journal.

Goryachev's double game, engaging simultaneously with the Kremlin and the neo-Nazi underground, was partly modelled on the experience of the Irish republican movement, which combined a political wing (Sinn Fein) and a paramilitary wing (IRA). The relevance of this model had been proposed by Aleksandr Sevast'yanov in 2003 after his National Great Power Party was barred from competing in Duma elections.[6] As Russkii Obraz rose to prominence, the Irish experience became a constant point of reference in Goryachev's journalism and public utterances.[7] His LiveJournal blog was named after James Connolly, an Irish insurgent executed by the British for his role in the Easter uprising of 1916.[8] 'He is one of those who entered the Irish Resistance's pantheon of heroes,' explained Goryachev, 'for whom I nurture an inexplicable weakness.'[9] This infatuation elicited some perplexed bemusement in the far-right internet. One critic suggested on the community blog of Russkii Obraz that Goryachev should march under the flag of Ulster at a nationalist demonstration. 'I am not under the flag of Ulster,' retorted Goryachev. 'I am under the flag of the IRA.'[10] This was no exaggeration. The columns of Russkii Obraz at two of its major public demonstrations, the 2008 Russian March and the 2009 'Russian First of May' parade, were headed by drummers dressed in IRA berets and military fatigues.

The readiness of the Kremlin to turn a blind eye to Russkii Obraz's extremism was facilitated by the nature of the Medvedev-Putin 'tandemocracy.' On the one hand, the new president's liberal rhetoric served as a smokescreen for the cultivation of the most fanatical adversaries of liberalism. Not without reason did Il'ya Goryachev reflect that his interlocutors from the Presidential Administration were 'very cynical people' who did not care whether he was a Nazi or a Satan-worshipper.[11] The effects of this ideological nihilism were compounded by the expansion of the Kremlin's manipulation of political life. During the 2000s, the regime's political technologists had fabricated or co-opted a small army of loyalists from the fringes of politics: neo-Stalinists, Eurasianists, National-Bolsheviks, civilisational nationalists, and ethno-imperialists. Even Antifa were approached by the regime's surrogates.[12]

Like other extremists who had found an official 'curator,' pro-Kremlin neo-Nazis had a place in Russia's controlled public sphere in 2008–9. On many points of detail, they clashed with their rivals, but all contributed to the stability of the regime. In the media, these extremists generated a cacophony that created an appearance of political pluralism and ideological contest. At the same time, they all rejected liberal democracy, condemned 'coloured revolution,' and acquiesced in the Kremlin's supervision of public life. In the process, they contributed to a kind of authoritarian consensus and helped to isolate the extra-systemic opposition. What made the mobilisation of these elements dangerous was that performance could become indistinguishable from reality. The use of inflammatory language, demands for repression, calls to destroy enemies, and proposals for a dystopian future became proof of authenticity, not a warning sign.

The spectre of 'Orangist' nationalism

The transformation of Russkii Obraz into a public movement was part of the Kremlin's reaction to the coalescence of an 'Orangist' coalition of radical nationalists and national liberals. This coalition was symbolised by the cooperation between the radical nationalist Aleksandr Belov ('Potkin'), the leader of DPNI, and the national liberal Aleksei Naval'nyi, a regular participant in Dissenters' Marches (*Marshi nesoglasnykh*).[13] There were obvious reasons for the Kremlin to be concerned about this convergence. During the leadup to the presidential election, the security forces had successfully contained the crowds of National-Bolsheviks and liberals at Dissenters' Marches. An influx of radical nationalists into 'Orangist' ranks would make opposition protests much harder to disperse. The Russian Marches had not only vastly outnumbered the crowds at liberal and leftist protests, but also mobilised violent militants who would be less controllable than the generally docile crowds at the Dissenters' Marches. Official anxiety was undoubtedly compounded by fears about impact of the Global Financial Crisis, which began to affect the Russian economy in the summer of 2008.

Aleksandr Belov's first flirtation with 'Orangism' took place in the aftermath of the Kondopoga riots. In the autumn of 2006, he organised the first 'Russian March' with Dmitrii Rogozin, who had recently been ousted as leader of the Rodina party because of his embrace of 'Orangist' tactics.[14] This march was crushed by the

security forces, but the authorities did permit a rally by Narodnyi Soyuz (NS), whose leader, Sergei Baburin, was a critic of Rodina's 'Orangist' turn. One sign of Baburin's collaboration with the Kremlin was his refusal to allow Belov to address the crowd. According to Belov, Baburin had told him that he was acting on orders from Vladislav Surkov, the deputy head of the Presidential Administration, who had warned that if Belov were allowed 'to utter even one word,' then NS 'will be immediately shut down.'[15] Apparently intimidated by this ban, Belov attempted to reposition himself as an opponent of 'Orangism' in the spring of 2007, when he and Rogozin were attempting to create a new legal party, Velikaya Rossiya. In April, Belov was an organiser of 'The Day of Truth,' an authorised nationalist demonstration in Bolotnaya Square, which was advertised as 'our response to the "Orangist" populists and the Kremlin "puppet masters".'[16] This concession to the regime brought few benefits. Velikaya Rossiya became one of the many victims of the purge of the political landscape on the eve of the Duma elections.

For Belov, the point of no return came in the summer of 2008, when he attempted to transform the DPNI into a conventional political party. Acting in the name of DPNI, Belov made common cause with three prominent nationalist groups at a conference at Moscow's Kosmos Hotel on 'New Political Nationalism.' His partners were Andrei Savel'ev's Velikaya Rossiya, Konstantin Krylov's ROD and Aleksei Naval'nyi's Narod movement. All signed a 'Pact of 8 June,' which challenged both their exclusion from electoral competition and the Kremlin's management of political life. The signatories promised to coordinate their efforts to compete in elections and to exchange information about any contacts with the authorities.[17] They also issued a kind of manifesto of democratic nationalism. This Political Declaration demanded the restoration of free elections and asserted that 'democracy is essential but not sufficient.' Russia should also become a *russkii* national state, because 'the nation is the only thing that links the regime and the population by ties of solidarity and mutual obligation.' In an obvious allusion to the current ruling elite, it warned that Russia was in danger of becoming 'the impotent loot of oligarchic, bureaucratic, and criminal clans.' To rescue the country from these predators, the signatories vowed to pursue political methods and to overcome the obstacles put in their path by 'Kremlin-directed [*podkremlevskie*] pseudo-nationalists' and by 'marginal groups, who proclaim themselves nationalist but represent only gangs of thugs.'[18]

The authorities made no secret of their displeasure at the New Political Nationalism. The conference was picketed by Rossiya Molodaya (RuMol), one of the most aggressive pro-Kremlin youth organisations. From the roof of the hotel, RuMol activists scattered pamphlets, which claimed that the event was the latest machination of 'the provocateur and emissary of Western foundations' Stanislav Belkovskii, a prominent political technologist.[19] According to the pamphlet, Belkovskii was nothing less than 'a Father Gapon of Russian Nationalism,' a reference to the Orthodox priest and police collaborator who had led crowds of protesting workers to the Bloody Sunday massacre in January 1905.[20] Far from uniting nationalists, the aim of the conference was 'to bring [Belkovskii] and his Western supervisors political dividends and lead a significant part of the Russian patriotic movement to the swamp of marginality.'[21]

The accusation that Belkovskii was the instigator of the 'new political nationalism' was not entirely groundless. For some years, Belkovskii had advocated a convergence of nationalists and democrats on the model of Ukraine's Orange Revolution. Behind the scenes, he had played a role in the launching of Naval'nyi's Narod movement.[22] According to emails released by hackers in 2011, Belkovskii (under the pseudonym 'Gustav von Aschenbach') had advised Naval'nyi about building a nationalist coalition, the preparations for the conference, and the drafting of its Political Declaration.[23] Naval'nyi' made no secret of his goal of integrating Russian nationalists into an anti-Kremlin coalition. In his speech to the conference, he declared that 'we must unite with the left and liberals in order to achieve elections, which we will win.'[24]

The main target of the Kremlin's proxies, however, was Aleksandr Belov. In June 2008, DPNI was a powerful grassroots network, uniting middle-class sympathisers and skinhead gang members. None of the other organisations represented at the conference could rival DPNI's capacity to mobilise militant crowds.[25] Unsurprisingly, Belov's address was singled out for disruption. No sooner had he begun to speak than four RuMol activists rushed to the stage and hurled plastic dildoes at him.[26] Despite the podium being overturned, Belov was unperturbed. While the attackers were dragged out of the hall, he thanked them for the spectacle, which DPNI promptly used in a video about 'the enemies of Russian nationalism.'[27]

More serious was an attack on Belov from within DPNI. It was instigated by Aleksei Mikhailov, a veteran DPNI militant and a member of the inner circle of Russkii Obraz. Two days after the conference, Mikhailov released a statement in the name of the Moscow Council (Mossovet) of DPNI, which accused Belov of exceeding his powers. Announcing that the Mossovet was not bound by Belov's signature, the statement disparaged the Pact as nothing more than 'a personal initiative of the acting leader of DPNI A. Belov, who was not authorised to conduct such actions.'[28]

Undeterred, Belov presided over the DPNI's first formal congress one month later. He used the occasion to commit himself to 'nationalism in velvet gloves,' nationalism 'not with a beard and enormous boots, but with a suit and tie.' This sartorial renovation signified a change of constituency. Instead of skinhead gangs, the DPNI would now appeal to a mass electorate. Although he denied that the DPNI would become a political party, Belov promised to create a structure that would satisfy the requirements of the law on political parties. The aim was to prepare the movement for the inevitable democratisation of the political system. To fill the national-patriotic niche, he argued, 'we must not be a xenophobic sect… we must interest ordinary citizens, without frightening them in any way.'[29]

This embrace of conventional politics provoked swift retaliation from Aleksei Mikhailov's faction, which stormed out of the congress hall. Several representatives of regional branches followed in its footsteps.[30] In September 2008, these rebels convened a rival congress, attended by delegates of 30 regional DPNI branches, who voted to expel Belov for collaborating with 'Orangists.'[31] What had happened, insisted one of the organisers, was not a split in the movement, but merely Belov's departure. In turn, Belov denounced the rebels as 'an FSB outfit [*kontora*],' conducted by about 15 people driven by personal animosity.

'This is,' he declared, 'a dead project.'[32] In fact, the rebels' project was very much alive. At its centre was Russkii Obraz, a tiny, closed organisation that was about to burst into the limelight and become a major factor in the politics of Russian nationalism. This breakthrough was made possible by the turmoil within DPNI. A large segment of the DPNI's support base, skinheads and football hooligans alienated by Belov's 'suit and tie' nationalism, gravitated towards Russkii Obraz. Some of them were enticed by DPNI activists like Aleksei Mikhailov and the Valyaev brothers, who also belonged to the inner circle of Russkii Obraz. Others were attracted by Russkii Obraz's glamorous image and branding, the work of the skilful PR and media professionals who dominated its leadership.

'Radovan, we are with you!'

Russkii Obraz's emergence as a rival to DPNI was made possible by Kremlin support. This support was never publicly articulated. Instead, it was managed, within the informal framework of *Sistema*, by intermediaries from pro-Kremlin youth organisations. Some of these intermediaries had a history of involvement in far-right subcultures. In October 2008, Il'ya Goryachev boasted in an email that 'we are communicating with subcultural people' in the regime.[33] These collaborators within the apparatus of pro-Kremlin structures contributed to the rise of Russkii Obraz in three ways. First, they ensured that senior functionaries in the Presidential Administration perceived Russkii Obraz in a favourable light. Second, they acted as 'patrons' and 'curators,' dispensing funding, giving instructions, and offering advice. And third, they helped to build ties between the leaders of Russkii Obraz and influential figures in the sphere of systemic politics.

By Goryachev's own admission in an email from late 2008, Aleksei Mitryushin was his 'main partner.'[34] A leader of the football gang Gallant Steeds, Mitryushin had worked in a succession of pro-Kremlin youth organisations. In his capacity as a director of United Russia's Russkii Proekt, Mitryushin had employed Goryachev to supervise the Georgievtsy, the pro-Kremlin Orthodox Christian youth organisation. This collaboration reached a new level during 2008–9, when Goryachev and Mitryushin regularly communicated by uploading messages to a single email address, ominously named 'srebrenica46' after the site of the genocidal massacre of Muslim men and boys committed by Bosnian Serbs in 1995.[35]

The central theme of this correspondence was the struggle against 'Orangism.' In search of financial and political opportunities, Goryachev offered Mitryushin a series of projects that could be presented to his Kremlin supervisors as a blow to the extra-systemic opposition. A striking example is Goryachev's email dating from 3 May 2008, which proposed that Russkii Obraz disrupt the planned 'National Assembly,' an alternative parliament organised by the Other Russia coalition. Goryachev reported that he had recently met the coalition's leaders, Garry Kasparov and Eduard Limonov, who were 'passionately exhorting us nationalists to join their assembly.' Reassuring Mitryushin that he had no desire to accept the invitation, Goryachev warned that the Western press would hail the parliament as 'a force, a real parliament blah blah blah.' To forestall this development, Goryachev set out a 'wildly cunning but also very loyalist plan.' At the

beginning, 20 militants from regional branches of Russkii Obraz would take their seats as delegates to the assembly. Then, on command, they would storm out, 'making all sorts of exposés, announcements for the media, relying on inside information.' The scandal 'would be based on the idea that nationalists realised that this gathering is made up of real enemies of Russia and everything Russian [*russkii*].' If Mitryushin was interested, concluded Goryachev, 'we will be ready to discuss the price.'[36]

This audacious provocation was never set in motion, but Goryachev's partnership with Mitryushin developed rapidly. By October 2008, according to Goryachev, he was working with Mitryushin 'on several closed projects in the interests of ZOG' (a neo-Nazi acronym for 'Zionist Occupation Government,' here the Kremlin). These projects, explained Goryachev, were 'directed against blacks [*churki*] and Antifa.'[37] Evidently some of the money came from official or semi-official grant donor structures. In July 2008, Goryachev wrote to Mitryushin about the notarised documents required 'for us to be given a little grant for public activity – for the struggle against accursed, noxious blacks and Antifa, and also simply for European trips, bars, booze, and girls.'[38] The jocular, racist language testifies to Goryachev's trust in his curator and to the subcultural prejudices that they shared. Their correspondence also suggests that working for the Kremlin offered benefits both for Goryachev's ideological agenda and for his lifestyle. By his own admission, Goryachev earned 60% of income during this period from projects arranged through Mitryushin.[39]

Much of this work revolved around the monitoring of leftist and Antifa militants. In 2007–8, Goryachev was involved in the production of a 'Report on the Activity of left-radical Forces in Russia.' It was, he explained at his trial, a commercial project undertaken for the Presidential Administration in fulfilment of a grant that Mitryushin had helped to secure.[40] In the process, Goryachev was able to exploit the database that he was building up about his Antifa adversaries. This database had been assembled from four main sources. First, Goryachev assiduously monitored Antifa websites and blogs. Second, he gained passport details of militants from visits by Kur'yanovich's aides to police stations after the arrests of protesters at left-wing demonstrations. Third, he shared information with other neo-Nazi activists like Roman Zheleznov, the editor of the Anti-antifa website. And fourth, he developed connections with the Interior Ministry's anti-extremism Tsentr 'E', the highly politicised police structure established in 2008.[41]

Even after the expiry of the grant, information about Antifa activism was a thread running through the Goryachev-Mitryushin correspondence at srebrenica46. Many of Goryachev's emails consisted of brief reports about impending actions or newly obtained photographs of militants and their addresses. This reportage was supplemented by a large volume of data and analysis. An email from Goryachev, dated 10 November 2008, contained four attachments: (1) a list of members of MTS (the Antifa group Moscow Trojan Skinheads); (2) a list of Antifa detained by the police; (3) an analysis of the Antifa movement; and (4) a diagram of the relationship of Antifa groups to the broader left-wing milieu.[42]

Mitryushin's funding of Russkii Obraz's research may have assisted his supervisors to understand the emerging threat from Russia's left-wing youth culture,

which was to play an important role in the protest movement of 2011–12. There were, however, real political hazards in outsourcing this kind of research to neo-Nazis. The Presidential Administration and Tsentr 'E' were not the only recipients of Goryachev's information about Antifa militants; Goryachev also sent the same information, with minor changes, to the neo-Nazi gang Blood & Honour/Combat 18 and to Nikita Tikhonov, Goryachev's close friend and the leader of BORN.[43] In effect, the Kremlin's grants for 'closed projects' were subsidising the hunt for Russkii Obraz's political adversaries.

Goryachev's other 'curator' was Leonid Simunin, who epitomised the way that *sistema* facilitated the intermingling of semi-criminal business identities and pro-Kremlin youth activists. According to Goryachev's testimony under interrogation, he met Simunin in 2007 and worked closely with him.[44] Goryachev claimed that Simunin 'handles the youth movement Mestnye for the Presidential Administration of Russia, and combines this with the unofficial handling of the Russkii Obraz movement.'[45] Simunin's formal position in Mestnye was the head of its Lyubertsy branch, but he also enjoyed a reputation as a local gangster.[46] Until the exposure of his links to Russkii Obraz, he was best known for his role as the leader of a group of skinheads who had ambushed Eduard Limonov and his entourage outside Moscow's Taganskii courthouse in April 2006.[47] Behind the scenes, Simunin was to play a crucial role in the integration of Russkii Obraz into the system of 'managed nationalism.' Simunin's relationship with Goryachev appears to have been multifaceted, part business, part political. As director of the public relations company PRoryv, Simunin commissioned Goryachev to produce analytical reports about youth subcultures and to assist with internet marketing.[48] Two other meetings, revealed by Goryachev to his interrogators, testified to the darker side of Simunin's business dealings. On one occasion, Simunin met Goryachev to negotiate the hire of an enforcer (the fugitive Nikita Tikhonov) to extract money from his debtors. On another, Simunin asked Goryachev to arrange the purchase of a military-grade pistol from Tikhonov.[49]

What made Simunin important for Russkii Obraz was his role as an intermediary with the lower echelons of officialdom. It is likely that Simunin introduced Goryachev to Pavel Karpov, an aide to Nikita Ivanov, the key official responsible for 'managed nationalism' in the Presidential Administration.[50] Karpov and Simunin were partners in two separate business ventures, a market research agency and an automobile repair shop, in 2009–10.[51] Like Mitryushin, Karpov exemplifies the infiltration of state structures by figures from far-right subcultures. In the early 2000s, Karpov had worked closely with Aleksandr Dugin, publishing articles in his journal *Arktogeya* and serving as press-spokesperson of the Eurasia movement.[52] This apprenticeship provided him with contacts, knowledge, and ideological sympathies that facilitated his supervision of the Kremlin's radical nationalist proxies.

During the summer of 2008, Karpov held a series of meetings with three leaders of Russkii Obraz: Il'ya Goryachev, Dmitrii Taratorin, and Aleksei Mikhailov. According to Goryachev, the subject of discussion was 'the socio-political development and prospects of RO.'[53] Undoubtedly Karpov was interested in the capacity of Russkii Obraz, with its networks extending into football gangs, the

ultranationalist music scene, and the skinhead underground, to mobilise crowds of militant, ideologically committed protesters. 'We constantly heard from Karpov,' recalled Goryachev, 'that more people are needed, bring out more nationalists.'[54] The most glaring weakness of the existing pro-Kremlin youth organisations was their lack of a support base. Students brought on buses to boost the numbers at demonstrations of Rossiya Molodaya (RuMol) often exhibited an embarrassing ignorance of what they were meant to be doing.[55]

The early months of the Medvedev presidency also witnessed the establishment of a working relationship between Goryachev and Maksim Mishchenko, the leader of RuMol. As a newly-elected Duma deputy from Edinaya Rossiya, Mishchenko was an attractive ally. With Kur'yanovich's departure from the Duma, Goryachev had lost not only his status as a parliamentary aide, but also his ability to intercede on behalf of allies and clients. In April 2008, Goryachev wrote to Simunin to inquire whether Mishchenko might take up where Kur'yanovich had left off:

> In the 4th Duma, we felt pretty good, using deputy's inquiries to help every kind of business suffering from raiders, victims of disputes of economic entities etc…. Do you think that Maksim [Mishchenko] is ready to defend small business as our president Dmitrii Medvedev, ordains?[56]

Evidently the answer was affirmative. Two months later, Goryachev boasted to Aleksandr Belov that he was conversing every day with Mishchenko's assistant.[57]

Mishchenko's readiness to collaborate with Goryachev may have been influenced by his own growing interested in the Balkans. On 17 February 2008, RuMol had reacted to Kosovo's declaration of independence by staging a flash mob outside the Serbian embassy in Moscow. In a satire of US world domination, a troupe of performers – the Grim Reaper escorted by US soldiers – grappled with an inflatable globe.[58] For those who had missed the point, Mishchenko explained to the media: 'Serbia is a dress rehearsal for the disintegration of Russia. Now the Americans are watching our reaction, actions, attitudes. And we are next.'[59] Three months later, thanks to his dialogue with Goryachev, Mishchenko was able to announce that RuMol, in collaboration with Serbian Obraz, was distributing St. George ribbons in Belgrade for Victory Day celebrations.[60] This development, at a time when other pro-Kremlin youth organisations were encroaching on Russkii Obraz's areas of expertise, evoked some disquiet in Russkii Obraz. In an email to a close collaborator, Goryachev noted that functionaries of Nashi and Dugin's ESM 'had suddenly become such experts on the Balkans' that they were travelling to Belgrade as election observers. This tendency, he observed, 'is wrong and must be corrected.' By contrast, Mishchenko's initiative was auspicious because it relied upon the expertise of Russkii Obraz: 'This is a plus for us, and a minus for him.'[61]

The first test of Russkii Obraz's ability to rally nationalists behind the regime was a joint demonstration with Mishchenko's RuMol and Dugin's ESM in support of an indicted war criminal. On 10 August 2008, under the slogan 'Radovan, we are with you!,' several hundred ultranationalist youths from the three

organisations assembled in Moscow's Pushkin Square.[62] They were protesting against the arrest of Radovan Karadžić, the fugitive former president of Republika Srpska, whom Serbian police had transferred to the custody of the International Criminal Court on the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) on 30 July.[63] Karadžić was an iconic figure for Russkii Obraz, which glorified a host of Serbian war crimes suspects as patriotic heroes. A convergent stance was taken by Mishchenko, who hailed the prisoner as a 'Serbian Lion' and an innocent victim of Western aggression in the Balkans.[64]

What lent pathos to the demonstration in Pushkin Square was the outbreak, two days earlier, of Russia's war with Georgia, a state that was loathed both by Russian ethnonationalists and by Kremlin's youth auxiliaries. For Russkii Obraz, Georgia was a source both of ethnic criminality and non-Slavic immigration. For RuMol and ESM, it was a regime that had staged a successful 'coloured revolution' and become a symbol of Western influence in the post-Soviet space. With unrestrained enthusiasm, the two groups of militants chanted, 'Tanks to Tbilisi!'[65]

Goryachev's speech to the crowd was a characteristic combination of loyalist rhetoric to reassure his pro-Kremlin collaborators and covert signals to his neo-Nazi constituency. He likened Georgia's attack on South Ossetia to Croatia's invasion of the Serbian enclave of Slavonia and lamented the fact that Aleksandr Kots – the journalistic partner of Russkii's Obraz's Dmitrii Steshin – had been wounded during the fighting in Tskhinvali. Goryachev's main point, however, was that there were casualties 'not only on the frontlines, but also here, on the home front, where a fifth column of the enemy is operating.' Without explaining that the fifth column was a racial one and that its victims were skinhead fighters, Goryachev referred to the deaths, one day earlier, of 'Stas' and 'Roma.'[66] 'Stas' was Stanislav Kolegov, a leader of the Snakes Firm football gang, allegedly killed in a fight with a Dagestani bouncer in a nightclub.[67] 'Roma' was Roman 'Radio' Chubrevich, a founder of the Russian branch of the neo-Nazi gang, Blood & Honour/Combat 18, who had died in what was described on a DPNI forum as 'an unequal fight with "beasts".'[68] According to a neo-Nazi blogger, Chubrevich was 'one of those who laid the foundations of organised rightist street violence.'[69] Goryachev's lament for these martyrs served a double purpose. First, it equated neo-Nazi street fighters with the soldiers who were risking their lives at the frontlines in Georgia. Both became heroic defenders of the fatherland. Second, he was stigmatising ethnic outsiders as a 'fifth column,' alien invaders who served Russia's enemies. Goryachev concluded with a kind of call to arms:

> We are not an army. Today we are not at the front. But we are soldiers. Those who are gathered here are political soldiers. And it is up to us to determine the future of Russia. Our strength is in unity. One for all, and all for one![70]

This peroration concealed another wink to the neo-Nazis in his audience. The concept of 'political soldier,' which was central to Russkii Obraz's ideology, had been popularised in far-right circles by Jean-François Thiriart, a Belgian neo-Nazi activist and wartime collaborator, and by Derek Holland, a militant of the British National Front.[71] In Russia, it had been disseminated by Aleksandr Dugin,

who had met Thiriart in Paris in the late 1980s.[72] In far-right discourse, 'political soldier' signified a caste of elite warriors – Spartans, Roman centurions, crusaders, Romania's Iron Guard, and even Iranian revolutionary guards – whose faith and moral fortitude enabled them to perform feats of patriotic heroism in the face of incredible odds.[73]

The next speaker at the microphone, Russkii Obraz's ideologue Dmitrii Taratorin, offered a similar melange of loyalist rhetoric and far-right ideology. In his programmatic statements, Taratorin rejected the post-Soviet Russian state. 'We do not at all identify ourselves with the Russian Federation and the state as such,' he explained in late 2008.[74] Privately he despised the regime as 'the horde,' an allusion to the Mongol occupation.[75] To the crowd in Pushkin Square, however, he struck a pro-Kremlin pose, exhorting Russia's leaders to show firmness in order to avoid the fate of Karadžić. This concession to the spirit of the occasion did not prevent Taratorin from using the platform to expound his far-right ideology. He explained that Karadžić's extradition and the war in Georgia were much more than clashes between Russia and the Western democracies. Both events were part of an apocalyptic struggle between amoral liberalism and traditional societies. 'The international proponents of tolerance,' warned Taratorin, were constructing a 'planetary concentration camp' in which 'gay parades would be held on every corner' and 'strict punishment will be meted out in response to any attempt to demonstrate fidelity to the blood and faith of one's ancestors.' This 'New Gay World Order' would be guarded by NATO forces, who alone would be licensed to kill. The struggle against this global menace was being led by nationalists, by those who fought

> for the sacred right of peoples to choose their own fate, for the right to live by the precepts of ancestors, for the right to call foreigners foreign, and [to call] enemies enemies, for the right to die and to kill, while defending one's shrines.[76]

Despite the pathos of the speeches, the rally in Pushkin Square may have disappointed the supervisors of 'managed nationalism' in the Presidential Administration. According to Goryachev, the police were asked to inflate their estimate of the crowd from 200 to 1,000.[77] Nevertheless, for Russkii Obraz, the rally was a breakthrough. Goryachev would later describe it as a 'green light' from the authorities.[78] Never before had its leaders addressed a crowd of militants in one of Moscow's most important public spaces. As an organisation, it had staked a claim to a sector of Russia's controlled public arena, alongside authorised organisations like Rossiya Molodaya and ESM. On the evening after the demonstration, Taratorin wrote to Goryachev that the action had created 'a positive impression': Russkii Obraz had demonstrated 'realism, effectiveness, and a fighting spirit.' The next step was to seek official registration. Thanks to the internecine struggle tearing apart DPNI, Russkii Obraz had a chance to 'become the last bastion of responsible NS [national socialism].' What was particularly encouraging was that 'so far the Presidential Administration shows no allergy towards us.' The situation was 'promising but on a knife-edge.' Taratorin concluded that 'further steps need to be very carefully calculated.'[79]

Russian March 2008

There was no doubt that Russkii Obraz's preparations for its next test – wresting control of the annual Russian March from Aleksandr Belov's DPNI – were meticulously planned. The first stage was the consolidation of Aleksei Mikhailov's breakaway faction as the 'Russkoe DPNI' (RDPNI), a designation intended to draw attention to doubts about Belov's ancestry. RDPNI became the basis of a rival organising committee for the Russian March, which included another front for Russkii Obraz (Russkoe grazhdanskoe obshchestvo, 'Russian civil society'), the moribund NDPR, and the former Duma deputies Viktor Alksnis (NS) and Nikolai Kur'yanovich.[80]

To build support for this rival committee, Russkii Obraz conducted a carefully orchestrated PR campaign that transmitted very different messages to the state and to ultranationalist subcultures. On the one hand, Russkii Obraz tried to reassure the authorities about its peaceful intentions. It applied to hold the march in the name of Baburin's NS, in which a cohort of Russkii Obraz militants occupied influential positions. The advantage of using NS as a front was that it had already served as a spoiler to split the Russian marches in 2006 and 2007. At the same time, leaders of Russkii Obraz made a public case for collaboration with the Kremlin. Addressing a press conference on 16 October, Dmitrii Taratorin argued that confrontations between the authorities and nationalists at previous Russian marches had served no one but Russia's enemies. The Georgian war, however, offered an opportunity to end this destructive cycle. While nationalists rallied behind the state, the regime had discovered the existence of a Russophobic 'fifth column.' In light of this reorientation, he concluded, 'the imminent Russian march can be regarded as an extended hand of friendship from nationalists to the authorities.'[81]

The sincerity of this gesture was open to question. While Taratorin was arguing for collaboration with the authorities, Russkii Obraz was also extending 'a hand of friendship' to the neo-Nazi underground. In late October, it issued a new programmatic statement, 'The Ethical Codex of a Russian Nationalist.' At a superficial glance, this document was an effort to prevent the eruptions of libellous vituperation that preceded each Russian march. A characteristic melange of racist discourse and moral platitudes, the codex asserted that 'an ability to pay attention to one's deeds and one's words and to answer for them was an essential characteristic of those who aspire to "Aryanism".' This ability was particularly important on the internet, where nationalist propaganda competed with 'virtual provocateurs, hysterics, and degenerate people.' Each nationalist should answer for his actions in this sphere, 'or he should automatically lapse from the Aryan into Semito-Hamitic ranks, from the category of *russkii* [ethnic Russian] into that of *rossiyanin* [a citizen of the Russian Federation].' The codex laid down nine commandments to guide nationalists in their interaction with each other. It forbade the dissemination of false rumours, abusive language, unfounded allegations, disclosure of confidential information, plagiarism, and scandalous gossip about private lives.[82]

More important than these injunctions were endorsements from two violent neo-Nazi gangs that symbolised the outer limits of far-right radicalism.

The Ethical Codex was signed not only by Russkii Obraz, but also by OB-88 and Blood & Honour/Combat 18 (B&H). The aim, as Goryachev later admitted, was 'to show, by publication of a text with signatures, that we, as Russkii Obraz, are supported by the subculture.'[83] The fact that these two gangs, both standard bearers of skinhead aggression, had associated themselves with the codex was also a potent refutation of the accusations that Russkii Obraz was nothing more than a pawn of the Kremlin.[84] In 2008–9, both B&H and OB-88 were on a path to armed struggle. Within months of the appearance of the Ethical Codex, the leader of B&H, Sergei Golubev, exhorted a crowd at a neo-Nazi concert in Oryol to emulate the methods of the Islamist insurgents in the northern Caucasus.[85] Officially disbanded in 2002, OB-88 had become the core of Nikita Tikhonov's BORN, which had already committed its first murders. In many ways, the Ethical Codex exemplified the symbiotic relationship between Russkii Obraz and the neo-Nazi underground. Although it acquired canonical status for Russkii Obraz, it was written by Tikhonov. According to a statement released by Sergei Golubev in 2011, Tikhonov 'prepared and wrote the Ethical Codex.' In light of the validity of the positions set out in it and 'Tikhonov's personal authority,' B&H 'completely supported it and posted it on our sites.'[86]

Despite Russkii Obraz's public collaboration with these notorious neo-Nazi gangs, the Moscow Mayor's office approved an application, submitted in the name of Russkii Obraz and NS, for a 'Russian March' along the Shevchenko embankment.[87] Three days later, Belov's original organising committee announced that the joint DPNI–Slavyanskii Soyuz application had been rejected.[88] All of its proposed routes were deemed unsuitable, either because of traffic disruptions or because other organisations had been granted permission to use the location.[89] Official preferences were underlined by Mikhail Solomentsev, the chairman of the city government's Committee for Interregional Links and Nationality Policies, who promised to combat extremism 'both amongst Russian nationalists and amongst [ethnic] diasporas.' Turning a blind eye to Russkii Obraz's extremism, he demanded an investigation of a DPNI pamphlet.[90]

There is no doubt that Russkii Obraz's assault on DPNI was closely coordinated with the Kremlin. In an email to Mitryushin on 30 October, Goryachev promised to denounce Belov at Russkii Obraz's next press conference, which would be attended by reporters from Interfax, RIA-Novosti, and television stations. Moreover, SPAS television 'will certainly produce a pretty report which can be shown to [Pavel] Karpov.'[91] In public, the leaders of Russkii Obraz made no secret of their intention to exclude Belov from their march. Aleksei Mikhailov invited all nationalists to join the authorised march 'except people who demean us… [who] are responsible for marginalisation, and who are engaged in populism, in hysterics.'[92] Belov confirmed in a video statement that he was the target of this anathema. Responding to accusations that he had embarked on a path of confrontation with the regime, Belov explained that he had conducted negotiations with the organisers of the authorised march but was told in no uncertain terms that neither DPNI nor he personally would be welcome because of the objections of the Presidential Administration.[93]

The collusion between the regime and the organisers of the authorised march provoked acrimonious exchanges in the nationalist blogosphere. DPNI circulated posters featuring a caricature of Sergei Baburin, the leader of NS, as a Kremlin piper leading a herd of sheep. 'Come to our stable,' ran the caption.[94] The criticism intensified after reports that Russkii Obraz and its allies planned to proceed from the authorised demonstration to a rock concert organised by RuMol.[95]

Russkii Obraz retaliated with its own propaganda barrage. In a gesture to its Kremlin curators, it vilified Belov as a tool of Western powers that were trying to foment an 'Orange Revolution' in Moscow.[96] At the same time, it explained to its radical sympathisers that participation in the authorised event was a tactical ploy that was part of a long-term revolutionary project. It rejected accusations that it was playing 'a game according to the rules of the regime': 'No, it is a game according to the rules that are possible today. And in order to change them tomorrow, we must show unity and faith in victory.'[97]

Photograph 1 Russkii Obraz's 'IRA drummers' at the 2008 Russian March (credit: SOVA Center)

This revolutionary message was underlined by the unusual attire of the drummers who headed Russkii Obraz's column at the Russian march. Their green military fatigues and black berets may have been less picturesque than the gleaming helmets and chainmail of the contingent of *rekonstruktory*, participants in re-enactment of historic battles, who marched as medieval Russian warriors. But the drummers were bearers of an important message.[98] They were intended to resemble IRA fighters. To the initiated, their performance was a signal that Russkii Obraz was engaged in a kind of two-track revolutionary strategy, in which a political wing (Sinn Fein) and a paramilitary wing (IRA) waged a coordinated national liberation struggle.

Photograph 2 Dmitrii Taratorin speaking at the 2008 Russian March (credit: SOVA Center)

Russkii Obraz claimed that the march was attended by 1,500 people.[99] Most of them dispersed at the end of the procession route, but a small crowd remained to attend a rally in Bolotnaya Square. The speakers included not only Sergei Baburin and Nikolai Kur'yanovich, both former Duma deputies, but also Dmitrii Taratorin, Russkii Obraz's ideologue. Taratorin used the occasion to make a clarion call for a 'radical modernisation of nationalism.' Only such a transformation would make it possible to repeat the feat of Minin and Pozharskii, the leaders of the national uprising commemorated by the Day of National Unity, who had driven foreign usurpers from the Kremlin in 1612. According to Taratorin, this modernisation required a purge of 'provocateurs and simply crooked people,' an obvious reference to Belov and his allies in DPNI. It also required the mobilisation of nationalists in the name of 'a Russian civil society,' which would not be fabricated by liberal decrees but would grow from indigenous sources. For Taratorin, this civil society would confront the nation's two mortal foes: liberals and the Left Front.[100]

Taratorin's presence on the stage testified to the changing relationship between Russkii Obraz and NS. For two years, activists of Russkii Obraz had a parasitic relationship with Baburin's party, which they hoped to use as a stepping stone to the Duma. When NS was barred from the December 2007 elections, the parasites became predators. The humbling of Baburin created an opportunity to draw NS cadres into Russkii Obraz's developing national network. Militants of regional branches had little incentive to remain loyal to a political project that no longer offered access to power. Unlike Baburin's old guard, Russkii Obraz appeared to be a rising force, at once glamorous, radical, and well-funded. The tension between the two groups erupted into open conflict in the aftermath of the Russian march, when the Kremlin instructed Baburin to shut down NS, the last surviving Russian nationalist party. On 19 November, Dmitrii Taratorin, who had participated in the

negotiations, informed Goryachev that the authorities had already made a down payment to Baburin; the balance would follow after the extraordinary congress of NS on 12 December.[101] At the congress, Baburin tried to persuade delegates that their party should be transformed into a public association because 'during the coming years, politics is finished in our country [and] we do not wish to participate in pre-election theatrical productions.' To his consternation, this move was fiercely resisted by a group of delegates linked to Russkii Obraz. Il'ya Goryachev would later recall:

> Incited by us, Misha from Izhevsk, Pasha from Abakan, and many other worthy delegates, who at that moment were already in RO or became so a little later, delivered inflammatory speeches. The voting ceased to be unanimous, the congress slowly began to boil. Sergei Nikolaevich [Baburin] became indignant and castigated our group from the podium, lashing out at 'conspirators' and calling on us not to muddy the waters and interfere.[102]

Ultimately, one third of the congress voted with the 'conspirators.'[103] In the process, Russkii Obraz demonstrated its potential as an agent of disruption. For Goryachev, this was an instructive defeat: 'Once again, we understood that a united, motivated group could direct hundreds of other people. If we had so desired, with enough preparations before the congress, it might have been directed either way. Good experience for the future.'[104]

The struggle over NS coincided with an attempt to clarify Russkii Obraz's previously inchoate ideology. On 11 November 2008, about 40 militants of Russkii Obraz and sympathisers met at Falanster, the fashionable left-wing bookshop, for the launching of Dmitrii Taratorin's tract, *Russkii bunt naveki* ('The eternal Russian Rebellion'). On Russkii Obraz's website, the work was described as 'fundamental research, whose conceptual foundations are the basis of our ideology.' In fact, this 'fundamental research' was an eclectic series of observations, polemical and aphoristic, about Russian history. At its core were three central contentions. First, it presented the past 500 years of Russian history as a struggle between *russkie* (ethnic Russians) and the rossiyan, the citizens of the cosmopolitan empire forged by Peter the Great and inherited by the Bolsheviks. Second, it rejected the idea of human equality as expressed both in liberal and socialist traditions. Instead it proposed a society structured on caste lines, a society with clear demarcations between warriors, thinkers, priests, and workers. Third, it advanced the idea of a 'Party Order,' a synthesis of a political party and a medieval knightly order, an idea that Taratorin derived from Eurasianist thinkers and Ivan Il'in. This party was not to be a mass organisation, but a core of ideologically committed militants who would lead a national revolution.[105]

A month later, Taratorin elaborated the political implications of this tract in a programmatic statement with the Leninist title, 'What is to be done?' On the one hand, he argued that collaboration with the Putin regime was possible if it benefitted Russkii Obraz. The reason was that the Russian Federation was fundamentally alien; it was something from another galaxy. On the other, Taratorin rejected conventional nationalist appeals to the Russian people. According to him, there

was no 'people,' only a population made up of a mass of atomised individuals. In these conditions, Russkii Obraz's primary task was strengthen 'own brotherhood, our community,' which might become a kind of polis, comparable to the city states of ancient Greece or Kievan Rus. The danger, conceded Taratorin, was that such fragile entities were vulnerable to overwhelming force, as the Mongol horde had demonstrated when it devastated the principalities of Kievan Rus' in the thirteenth century. The antidote to this threat was terrorism:

> If everyone will get a grenade launcher, like a Spartan's sword, and is ready, in contingents of twenty, to attack Mumbai or New York, no NATO is intimidating. Because the price of the matter for ZOG will turn out to be disproportionate.[106]

In short, Taratorin proposed a dual-track strategy, which justified both collaboration and terrorism. Here was a theoretical justification for Russkii Obraz's work for the Kremlin and its support for the neo-Nazi underground.

Dialogue with the state

During the winter of 2008–9, Russkii Obraz reaped the rewards of collaboration with the Kremlin. While the Investigative Committee prosecuted Aleksandr Belov for extremist statements, Goryachev and his friends basked in a kind of respectability.[107] They were treated seriously by high-ranking state functionaries, who accepted invitations to participate in forums organised by Russkii Obraz. They worked closely with the Duma deputy Maksim Mishchenko, who enabled them to promote their anti-immigrant propaganda as legislative initiatives. There was every sign that Russkii Obraz was on the path to realising Taratorin's dream of becoming 'the last bastion of responsible NS.'

Russkii Obraz's new status was on display at a round-table that it hosted jointly with SPAS on 10 December 2008. The participants included two deputies from United Russia (Maksim Mishchenko and Sergei Popov) and the prominent pro-Kremlin commentator Aleksei Mukhin. These pillars of the political establishment were pitted against three Russkii Obraz activists, who appeared as representatives of different organisations. Only Goryachev spoke on behalf of Russkii Obraz; Dmitrii Taratorin and Aleksei Mikhailov represented SPAS and Russkoe Grazhdanskoe Obshchestvo (Russian Civil Society) respectively. The ostensible topic for discussion was labour migration under the conditions of the global economic crisis. Popov's comments were devoted entirely to technical matters. Mishchenko confined himself to a critique of the neo-liberal economic policies that encouraged construction firms to import Uzbek and Tadjik labourers from Central Asia.[108] But the presence of the two deputies lent respectability to the racist fulminations of Russkii Obraz's representatives. Dmitrii Taratorin used the occasion to denounce the liberal assumption that criminality had no ethnicity. On the contrary, he argued, the surge of ethnic criminality could not be understood without examining Chechen martial values and the prevalence of Central Asians as suspects in rape investigations.[109]

Russkii Obraz had promoted the round-table as a 'direct action' that would result in legislative proposals. The following day, 60 activists from Russkii Obraz took these proposals to a rally in Teatral'naya Square, near the State Duma. In response to a phone call from Goryachev, Mishchenko came out to receive their petition, posed for photographs with Taratorin, and promised to take their proposals back to the Duma.[110] Their submission included a constitutional amendment to recognise ethnic Russians (*russkie*) as the 'state-forming people' and changes to the criminal code to increase the punishment for violent crimes committed by illegal immigrants and ethnic diasporas. The very identity of criminals, according to Russkii Obraz, should become an aggravating circumstance.[111] Goryachev extolled the meeting with Mishchenko as 'a direct continuation of our constructive dialogue with the regime, which has begun to realise that economic expediency does not justify uncontrolled immigration.'[112]

That dialogue reached a new level on 24 December, when Mishchenko joined two leaders of Russkii Obraz (Goryachev and Mikhailov) as signatories of an inflammatory anti-immigrant statement. In a public appeal addressed to the Moscow police, the Moscow City Duma and the Federal Protection Service (FSO), they called for a ban on non-Slavic immigrants attending the New Year's concert in Red Square. In recent years, they complained, these celebrations had become 'a mass gathering of Moscow guest workers, mostly immigrants from the countries of Central Asia,' who made locals feel like 'foreigners in their own country.' In the wake of the economic crisis, 'our compatriots' were also threatened by violence at the hands of bands of immigrants left unemployed and embittered.[113] This xenophobic diatribe became a minor scandal in the blogosphere. One tribute to its resonance was a parody by the celebrated blogger Maksim Kononenko ('Mr. Parker'), who could assume that his readers understood the object of his satire when they read a stirring call by American demanding the exclusion of foreigners from the New Year's Eve celebrations on Times Square.[114]

Despite the controversy, the Moscow city authorities were unperturbed. One day after their call for a racially segregated New Year, Mishchenko and a quartet of Russkii Obraz insiders (Goryachev, Taratorin, Mikhailov, and Steshin) met Mikhail Solomentsev, the chairman of the city government's Committee for Interregional Links and Nationality Policies. As a functionary closely involved in the city government's regulation of the recent Russian March, Solomentsev had reason to be aware of the identity of his visitors. Not only had he favoured Russkii Obraz over DPNI, but he had promised to work with law-enforcement bodies to combat 'offensive behaviour by national communities and migrants.'[115] Now he listened to Taratorin's proposal for the creation of vigilante 'civil patrols' to protect citizens from a supposed crime wave caused by unemployed immigrant workers. According to Goryachev, Solomentsev commended the idea as 'promising' and vowed to raise it with the mayor and the Interior Ministry.[116]

On 11 February 2009, Russkii Obraz's respectability was confirmed by the appearance of a high-ranking police officer on SPAS. Major General Leonid Vedenov, the head of the Interior Ministry's firearm licensing service, came to the studio for a discussion of gun ownership with Il'ya Goryachev and Dmitrii Taratorin.[117] Russkii Obraz publicly advocated freer availability of firearms as a

way of enabling law-abiding Russians to defend themselves against immigrant criminals, but its stance also reflected the need of its neo-Nazi 'partisan' allies for more firepower. Despite the fact that the panel included far-right militants, Vedenov referred ingratiatingly to his interlocutors as 'friends' and 'colleagues.' In its account of this discussion, SOVA Center expressed disbelief that Vedenov was unaware of the identity of his hosts, since Taratorin had been one of the organisers of the most recent Russian march.[118] In a later report, SOVA gave Vedenov the benefit of the doubt, but noted that 'in any case, such contacts are being skilfully used by ultra-rightist groups to demonstrate their own significance and influence.'[119]

Creating BORN

What was extraordinary about Il'ya Goryachev's interaction with the Presidential Administration and high state functionaries was that it coincided with a period of intense communication with Nikita Tikhonov, the fugitive who founded the terrorist group BORN. This dialogue was about much more than friendship. Goryachev became both an adviser and a source of intelligence for Tikhonov. Goryachev helped to inspire BORN's creation. He influenced Tikhonov's media strategy, his choice of targets, and his major ideological statement, 'Strategy 2020.' As leader of Russkii Obraz, Goryachev provided BORN with propaganda support and organised knife-fighting lessons for Tikhonov.

Members of Russkii Obraz had supported Tikhonov from the moment that he went into hiding in the summer of 2006. Tikhonov spent his first months as a fugitive in the apartment of Dmitrii Steshin, the *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* journalist who served on the editorial board of *Russkii Obraz* journal. Steshin helped Tikhonov to break into the black-market weapons trade by putting him in touch with a group of arms dealers from St. Petersburg. When Tikhonov moved out, Steshin continued to look after Tikhonov's personal belongings, including his passport, clothes, and books.[120] After spending the winter of 2006–7 at the flat of his neo-Nazi acquaintance Aleksei Korshunov, Tikhonov moved into accommodation rented for him by Il'ya Goryachev.[121]

It was here, in 2007, that Goryachev and Tikhonov held discussions that led directly to the creation of BORN. According to Tikhonov's courtroom testimony, Goryachev's thinking was deeply influenced by his developing relationship with representatives of the Presidential Administration. When Goryachev boasted about his new acquaintances in the corridors of power, Tikhonov pleaded with him to use his connections, and bribery if necessary, to get the case against him dropped. Goryachev rejected bribery as impractical, but then suggested that Tikhonov might win a reprieve by helping the Kremlin to terrorise its opponents:

> You have acquaintances in the milieu of skinheads and football hooligans, you can organise them and offer specific services. [Tikhonov] asked him to explain and Il'ya said that there is a certain Roman Verbitskii, a well-known

> football hooligan from Moscow's 'Spartak' [supporters]. With his people, he periodically attacks opposition actions, the so-called 'Dissenters Marches.' It is mainly the supporters of Eduard Limonov and Garry Kasparov who assemble there. You know that they do this for money and work for pro-government structures. And do you know why Roman Verbitskii became involved in this? There was a criminal case against him. They promised to lift the charges against him in return for these kinds of actions, that is to say, specific services to the regime.[122]

While this claim is difficult to verify, there was no doubt that Verbitskii enjoyed a kind of impunity. In August 2005, Nikita Ivanov from the Presidential Administration interceded to secure the release of Verbitskii and his accomplices from a police station after they had been arrested for attacking a meeting of left-wing radicals.

Despite the tempting prospect of exoneration, Tikhonov rejected Goryachev's proposal on political grounds. 'Limonovites and Kasparovites,' he explained, 'are not my enemies.' Undeterred, Goryachev settled upon a figure whom Tikhonov had reason to hate. According to Tikhonov's testimony, Goryachev arrived at their next meeting with a short printed report about the career of Stanislav Markelov, the human rights lawyer linked to the Antifa milieu. Markelov had pursued the killers of Aleksandr Ryukhin, the 19-year-old student ambushed by Tikhonov and a group of skinheads near an Antifa concert in April 2006. Goryachev's report drew attention to Markelov's days as a left-radical militant at university, his ideological affinity to anarchism, and his courtroom defence of Antifa activists. Goryachev proceeded to offer two sets of arguments for killing Markelov. On a personal level, the criminal case against Tikhonov would not be dropped as long as Markelov lived: 'He will appeal to the mass media, he will draw attention to himself, he will do everything to put you in prison, regardless of whether you are guilty or not.' Without this zealot, 'the matter might be resolved.' On a political level, Markelov was, according to Goryachev, the instigator of a new radical leftist project, which sought to displace the traditional left of the Communist Party with a movement that blended anarchist, anti-fascist, and anti-globalisation ideology. Drawing on the 'anti-Orangist' conspiracy theories of pro-Kremlin propagandists, Goryachev claimed that Markelov planned to use Western money to draw Antifa youth into this movement. The money would fund performances by foreign bands at rock concerts, where the audience would be invited to seminars for ideological indoctrination. What made Markelov particularly important, according to Goryachev, was his position as an intermediary between the leftist intellectual elite, Antifa street activists, and the Western left.

> It is in the interests of the regime to side-line, that is, to kill this person. Precisely this has been stipulated. If you render such a service to the authorities, if you help to disrupt the project of broad left-radical unification, all your sins will be forgiven.[123]

Goryachev's message was that the murder of Markelov would both earn gratitude in the corridors of power and eliminate the principal obstacle to the closure of the Ryukhin case.

The persuasiveness of Goryachev's proposal was undoubtedly magnified by the fact that Markelov was an object of loathing in Russian nationalist circles. As a lawyer, Markelov had played a crucial role in the imprisonment of two Russian officers for abuses in Chechnya: Sergei Lapin ('The Cadet'), who was convicted of the torture of a 'disappeared' student, Zelimkhan Murdalov; and Colonel Yurii Budanov, who was convicted of the murder of a young Chechen woman, El'za Kungaeva.[124] Radical nationalist animosity was aggravated by Markelov's well-known links to Antifa circles. He spoke frequently to the media about the neo-Nazi threat and was the reputed author of *Krasnaya Kniga Antifa* ('Red Book of Antifa'), a pamphlet that was both a critique of nationalism and a kind of anti-fascist manifesto.[125]

Inspired by this new plan, Tikhonov told Goryachev that he needed to enlist a helper. Goryachev agreed, assuring him that 'Markelov is only the beginning, we have a lot of work to do.'[126] In January 2008, Tikhonov crossed the border illegally into Ukraine, where he met his fellow fugitive and OB-88 veteran, Aleksandr Parinov ('Rumyn'). Like Tikhonov, Parinov was a suspect in the murder of Ryukhin. Although Parinov expressed interest in the idea of a paramilitary organisation, he was bedridden with hepatitis and unable to offer Tikhonov more than moral support.[127] Parinov would, however, come to play an important role in the history of BORN. He introduced Tikhonov to the neo-Nazi militant Evgeniya Khasis, who had once worked with Parinov in a Moscow sporting goods store, and who became Tikhonov's girlfriend and his accomplice in the murder of Markelov. After his recovery, Parinov would join Tikhonov in Moscow and participate in one of BORN's first crimes, the murder of a Central Asian immigrant labourer.[128]

During his Ukrainian sojourn, Tikhonov continued to discuss potential targets with Goryachev on the internet 'by allusions and allegory.'[129] That summer, Goryachev revealed that he had uncovered the identities of specific Antifa leaders who cooperated with Markelov. In a hint of the carnage to come, Goryachev told Tikhonov that he was 'very eagerly' awaiting his return.[130] Upon his arrival in Moscow in September 2008, Tikhonov met Goryachev for a discussion that defined the division of labour between them. Goryachev explained that Russkii Obraz was growing, but there was a need for an organisation that would, amongst other things, kill the enemies of Russian nationalism. Tikhonov, with his contacts in the skinhead milieu, could make this happen. Goryachev proposed two sets of targets. The first were the ideological adversaries of Russian nationalism, intellectual luminaries of the left like Markelov and the leaders of Antifa street gangs. The second were members of ethnic diasporas whose compatriots had committed highly publicised crimes against Russians.[131]

Goryachev's contribution to Tikhonov's terror campaign was to exploit his position as a beneficiary of managed nationalism to gather intelligence about potential targets. He stressed the importance of the concealment of his identity.

In his court testimony, Tikhonov recalled how Goryachev had emphasised his connections with the Kremlin:

> Il'ya said that no one can know about me. You know my position – I am engaged in politics, I head a legal organisation, I hold discussions with people from the Presidential Administration, I have a political future. I can only trust you.[132]

Goryachev promised to use his connections to obtain information about possible targets. As proof of his seriousness, he handed Tikhonov a list of the registered addresses and passport data of prominent Antifa militants. The names on the list included Fedor Filatov, Il'ya Dzhaparidze, and Ivan Khutorskoi, all future victims of BORN.[133] Goryachev hinted that he had sources in the law-enforcement organs.[134] This claim is consistent with Russkii Obraz's efforts to cultivate both rank-and-file police and the anti-extremism agents of Tsentr 'E'. Since his days as an aide to the Duma deputy Nikolai Kur'yanovich, the Russkii Obraz militant Evgenii Valyaev regularly visited police stations after arrests of Antifa militants to collect information from sympathetic police.[135] At the same time, Goryachev was sharing information about Antifa with Tsentr 'E' in an effort to encourage a crackdown on his political enemies. This collaboration with the law-enforcement organs complemented Goryachev's work with Mitryushin on a report for the Presidential Administration on 'The Activity of Left-Radical Forces in Russia.'[136]

After the meeting with Goryachev, Tikhonov began to assemble a team of fighters from his neo-Nazi acquaintances. One of his first recruits was Aleksei Korshunov ('Korshun'), who possessed both street-fighting skills and military experience. After service as a marine in Sevastopol, where he mingled in nationalist circles, Korshunov had spent two years as a warrant officer (*praporshchik*) in the FSB.[137] In court, Tikhonov would describe Korshunov as 'the most suitable and best prepared person for any action.'[138] Indeed, Korshunov made an important contribution to the group's combat potential by giving firearms lessons to Tikhonov. On a psychological level, however, Korshunov was volatile. According to Tikhonov, Korshunov boasted of possessing a 'satanic pride' and was unable to accept that others might be superior to him.[139] Another member of the group likened Korshunov to a 'wound up spring, since he was ready at any moment to show his aggressiveness.'[140] This instability, combined with a penchant for recklessness and brutality, disturbed Evgeniya Khasis, Tikhonov's girlfriend, who later testified that 'I am certain that if [Korshunov] had not fallen into the company of politically motivated people, he would have become an ordinary psychopath.'[141]

Tikhonov also enlisted one of Russia's most notorious skinhead militants, Mikhail Volkov ('Patrik' or 'Ed'). A former leader of Tikhonov's old gang OB-88, Volkov flaunted his neo-Nazi sympathies in his tattoos: Nazi weaponry on his left arm; a swastika on his right; and the face of Adolf Hitler on his chest.[142] In 2002, at the age of 20, he had been sentenced to nine years imprisonment for his role as the ringleader of the OB-88 skinheads who rampaged through Tsaritsyno

market.[143] The sentence was reduced to five years by the Supreme Court, and Volkov walked free after three years for good behaviour.[144] After his release, Volkov appeared to be on the path to rehabilitation. He ceased his involvement in neo-Nazi circles, found employment in a public relations company, and started a family.[145] But he had stayed in contact with Tikhonov, and offered him financial support when he went into hiding.[146]

The first victim of Tikhonov's group was one of Russia's leading Antifa activists, 26-year-old Fedor Filatov. Best known as a co-founder of the feared anti-fascist gang 'Moscow Trojan Skinheads' (MTS), Filatov featured on neo-Nazi websites as a major target.[147] In August 2008, he had participated in a raid by MTS on 'Kul't,' a club that was a base for the 'Go Vegas' neo-Nazi gang. A brawl between MTS and Kul't's bouncers escalated into a street fight in nearby Yauzkskie Vorota Square, which left four of the combatants hospitalised with serious stab wounds.[148]

Filatov's fate was sealed by Goryachev's assiduous intelligence gathering. The Antifa leader's name and address featured on the list of potential targets that Goryachev had given Tikhonov.[149] On the morning of 10 October, Tikhonov and Volkov ambushed Filatov near his apartment in Moscow's Izmailovo district.[150] Using a knife provided by Tikhonov, Volkov stabbed his victim repeatedly.[151] Two hours later, without regaining consciousness, Filatov died in hospital.[152] The death of such an iconic figure raised immediate fears of the outbreak of a 'stairwell war' between Antifa and neo-Nazi fighters. In an apparent attempt to avert a spiral of violence, the authorities arrested a prominent Antifa leader, Aleksei Olesinov ('Kobar'), who was regarded both as a possible combatant and a possible victim in the next round of bloodletting.[153] It may have saved his life. Olesinov featured on the list of names and addresses that Goryachev had passed to Tikhonov.[154]

The murder of Filatov was a catalyst for the transformation of Tikhonov's group into BORN, a terrorist organisation that used the media to magnify the impact of its attacks. According to Tikhonov's court testimony in 2015, Goryachev expressed 'ardent approval' of the killing of Filatov. But he suggested that 'more resonance' would be achieved by an aggressive public relations strategy. First, the group needed a name. Second, each attack should be followed by press releases to clarify the political identity of the perpetrators and their motives.[155] Prompted by Goryachev, Tikhonov conceived the name BORN as an acronym for 'Boevaya organizatsiya russkikh natsionalistov' (Combat Organisation of Russian Nationalists). 'I thought up the name BORN,' testified Tikhonov, 'but the idea belongs to Goryachev – he perceived it as a brand; he wanted it to be talked about.'[156] As a branding exercise, BORN was ingenious. On the one hand, it alluded to the historic exploits of the 'combat organisation' of SR (Socialist Revolutionary) terrorists in the revolutionary era.[157] On the other, it evoked the glamour and the martial prowess of Jason Bourne, the assassin–hero of a series of Hollywood action movies. This allusion to mass culture would echo in countless newspaper headlines about BORN during the years that followed.

Tikhonov announced the existence of BORN with two media releases at the end of the year. The first claimed responsibility for the brutal murder of a Tadjik

worker in Mozhaisk, a small town in the west of Moscow region, which had attracted the attention of Russian nationalists because of the rape and murder of a 15-year-old schoolgirl, Anna Beshnova, by a Tadjik immigrant worker on 1 October 2008. The reverberations of Beshnova's murder in the nationalist blogosophere were magnified by the arrest of Aleksandr Belov, the leader of the DPNI, who had been charged with organising an unauthorised demonstration after delivering an inflammatory speech to a gathering of local residents.[158] To exact vengeance, Tikhonov and Korshunov travelled on 6 December to Mozhaisk. They ambushed two Tadjik labourers, Salakhetdin Azizov and Dzhamshat Aliev, who were returning home from work at a fruit warehouse.[159] Aliev escaped with a head injury. Azizov was knocked down and murdered. Two days later, his severed head was left in a box outside the local administration building.[160] BORN explained the meaning of this gruesome gift in an email to newspapers and human rights organisations. The statement contained an explicit threat to 'Moscow bureaucrats':

> The surprise for Moscow bureaucrats was prepared by concerned Russian people who are sick of tolerating the invasion of foreigners into their native city… We don't need millions of Caucasians and Central Asians here! If bureaucrats continue to settle Russia with foreigners, then we will have to begin exterminating bureaucrats! Because there is no enemy worse than a traitor who is endowed with state powers and who is betraying his Russian origins. Bureaucrats, if you do not begin to expel the blacks we will begin to inflict vengeance on you for their crimes! And then your heads will fly![161]

As proof of their authenticity, the authors of the statement attached a photograph of the severed head to the email.[162]

Tikhonov's second statement claimed responsibility for the shooting of two Central Asian immigrants in Lunevo, a satellite town of Moscow, on 4 December 2008. According to the statement, the double murder was a reprisal for the killing of two Russians in the town three months earlier. Criticising the failure of the Lunevo authorities to track down the Russians' murderers, BORN explained that the two immigrants had been killed in accordance with the principles of collective guilt that supposedly governed the victims' traditional societies: 'The entire community of Asiatics will answer for the attack on Russians and the double murder.' The email concluded with an ultimatum to the local authorities to 'cleanse Lunevo of Asiatic colonists' or be treated as 'accomplices of occupiers.'[163] In fact, BORN had no connection to the killings in Lunevo. The purpose of this deception, Tikhonov told his interrogators, was to show that BORN was more than a skinhead gang, that it had firearms, and 'that it was already an underground organisation, that it was a Russian IRA.'[164]

Despite the brutality of these crimes, BORN's early statements received little publicity. Part of the reason was that there were widespread doubts that the crimes and the statements were the work of the same organisation. For some time, BORN was dismissed as a 'virtual project,' an attempt to create the illusion of a powerful revolutionary organisation by claiming responsibility for the crimes of diverse autonomous groups. 'It is mythical,' insisted Dmitrii Demushkin,

the leader of Slavyanskii Soyuz, the neo-Nazi skinhead organisation, as late as November 2009. 'It is simply an invented label, on which responsibility is hung after a decapitation. Such an organisation never existed.'[165] No less sceptical was Aleksandr Verkhovskii, the director of SOVA Center, who expressed doubt that BORN's declarations were the work of a single group of people.[166]

The murder of Markelov and Baburova

BORN's next crime sent shockwaves through the country. For several months, the group had been stalking Stanislav Markelov. In September 2008, Tikhonov and Korshunov had begun to keep watch outside the apartment building where he was officially registered.[167] Despite their persistence, they never glimpsed their target. The problem was solved by Goryachev, who suggested to Tikhonov that they track Markelov from one of his regular press conferences. Aided by Goryachev's notifications of the lawyer's appearances, BORN intensified its surveillance.[168] In December 2008, Antifa activists photographed Korshunov, who was lurking suspiciously outside the Independent Press Centre, where Markelov was addressing a press conference on the case of Colonel Yurii Budanov.[169] The next opportunity came on 19 January 2009, when Markelov was due to speak at a press conference at the same venue to protest against the release of Budanov four days earlier.[170] A few days earlier, Goryachev had warned the skinhead leader Sergei Golubev ('Oper') that something might happen and to expect a crackdown on the rightists.[171] Goryachev secured his own alibi by departing on a short visit to Belgrade.

Tikhonov and his girlfriend Evgeniya Khasis were waiting while Markelov spoke at the Independent Press Centre about his plans to instigate new proceedings against Budanov. When the press conference had finished, Markelov walked along Prechistenka street towards Kropotkinskaya metro station.[172] He was accompanied by Anastasia Baburova, a young journalist working for *Novaya Gazeta*. Like Markelov, Baburova was linked to the Antifa movement. Her last published article was a report about the trial of the neo-Nazi militant Maksim 'Tesak' Martsinkevich.[173]

The pair were being tracked by Evgeniya Khasis, who directed Tikhonov to them. At 14:25, Tikhonov approached from behind, and shot first Markelov then Baburova, in the head at close range. Markelov died instantly. Baburova never regained consciousness and died a few hours later in hospital.[174] Tikhonov then walked to the metro station, where his ticket was rejected at the turnstiles and he was forced to slip through the barriers behind another passenger. Close circuit television recorded his movements until he disappeared in the crowds at Biblioteka imeni Lenina station.[175]

The killing was a major political event. Markelov was a prominent public figure. As a lawyer involved in countless politically contentious cases, he had rarely left the limelight. His clients had included leftists like Andrei Sokolov (accused of blowing up a monument to Tsar Nikolai II), Antifa militants like Aleksei Olesinov, and endangered journalists like Mikhail Beketov. In courtrooms he had confronted perpetrators of atrocities in Chechnya like Colonel Budanov and Sergei Lapin, the corrupt local administration of Moscow's Khimki

region, and neo-Nazi skinheads. He had also been a close collaborator of Anna Politkovskaya, the *Novaya Gazeta* journalist whose murder two years earlier had become a major embarrassment for the regime because of President Putin's disdainful reaction. The parallels between the two murders were underlined by the fact that another *Novaya Gazeta* journalist, Anastasia Baburova, had died alongside Markelov.

The shock was magnified by the brazen nature of the crime, in broad daylight in central Moscow, a short walk from Christ the Saviour Cathedral. In the words of the newspaper *Moskovskii komosomolets*, 'Shock mixed with horror – these are the emotions evoked by the murders committed yesterday in the centre of Moscow.'[176] At noon the next day, a crowd of hundreds, including the Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin, gathered to lay flowers in memory of Markelov and Baburova at the scene of the crime.[177]

For many observers, the killings were a challenge to the authority of the state itself. At Markelov's funeral, the eminent lawyer Genri Reznik declared: 'This audacious crime, which took place two steps from the Kremlin, tells us that the criminal knew that he would be unpunished – this is a slap in the face of the state.'[178] Sergei Karaganov, a pro-Kremlin institutional intellectual and foreign affairs commentator, warned in the government broadsheet *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* that 'if the people and the organisations responsible for [the murders] are not promptly identified and punished, then this may call into question the government itself.'[179] Even the normally docile Public Chamber issued a declaring that 'what is at stake, as with the murder of Anna Politkovskaya, is the reputation of the country.'[180]

From the outset, the neo-Nazi underground featured prominently in media speculation about possible culprits. At a press conference hosted by the newspaper *Moskovskii komsomolets* on 22 January, the writer and veteran anti-Nazi campaigner Alla Gerber urged that the neo-Nazi angle be thoroughly investigated.[181] Four days later, *Novaya Gazeta* published a sample of the grotesque reactions to the killings on neo-Nazi websites and blogs, warning that the contents were 'not for children.' Many of the comments were celebratory ('I drank some champagne'). Some vilified the deceased as 'biowaste' and 'sub-humans.' Others denied that the murders constituted a crime. Identified in this chorus of hatred was Evgenii Valyaev, Russkii Obraz's press secretary, who exulted on his blog that 'two Russophobes have been sent to hell.'[182]

After ten days of prevarication, President Dmitrii Medvedev finally took action. In a gesture that contrasted with Vladimir Putin's callous reaction to the murder of Politkovskaya, Medvedev invited the editor of *Novaya Gazeta*, Dmitrii Muratov, to meet him in the Kremlin. What transpired was much more than a formal expression of condolences. Muratov used the occasion to complain that 'fascists feel socially close [to the police], they kill "non-Russians" almost daily, [and] the reaction of the authorities is weak.' In response, Medvedev deplored the fact that neo-Nazis were treating murder as an 'entertainment' and boasting about their crimes on the internet. 'This must be stopped,' he insisted.[183] Earlier that day, Medvedev had instructed a session of the FSB collegium to treat the struggle against 'nationalism and extremism' as a major priority. 'Any propaganda of separatism, nationalism and religious intolerance,' he declared, 'is a challenge to the

stability and unity of our multinational state.'[184] These statements were a signal to Russia's National Anti-Terrorist Committee (NAK), a body created in 2006 under the chairmanship of the FSB director to coordinate anti-terrorism measures by the security agencies.[185] In March 2009, NAK issued a memorandum reviewing the events of the previous year. For the first time, it identified the most dangerous terrorist threats on Russian territory as the jihadi insurgency in the Northern Caucasus and 'the activisation of neo-Nazi youth groups, which are employing the tactic of violent extremist actions.'[186]

Medvedev's strong public stance set in motion a massive police operation to track down the killers. During the ensuing months, investigators sifted through a million mobile phone signals recorded in the vicinity of the crime.[187] The investigation was headed by Major Igor' Krasnov, a Senior Detective for Especially Important Cases of the Investigative Committee of the Prosecutor's Office. Tenacious and fearless, Krasnov was loathed in nationalist circles for assembling the failed case against Vladimir Kvachkov and other far-right militants accused of the attempted assassination of Anatolii Chubais in 2005.[188] Krasnov's conduct of the Markelov investigation showed that he had learned from that debacle. To forestall claims that confessions had been extracted under duress, he insisted on making video-recordings of interrogations. To deepen his understanding of the neo-Nazi underground, he worked closely with *Novaya Gazeta*, which acted as an intermediary with the Antifa milieu. Antifa radicals were unwilling to have direct dealings with the security apparatus, but they trusted the newspaper to protect their identities.[189]

Krasnov's investigation may have been aided by the recklessness of some members of the inner circle of Russkii Obraz. Four days after the murder, Aleksei Baranovskii ('Sober') posted a panegyric to the killers on his LiveJournal blog ('Soberminded'). Titled 'Malicious Russians,' the post argued that violent insurrection was a path to national salvation:

> Armed uprising and the seizure of power is the method that is still capable of changing the course of Russia's history, it is capable of reversing the situation before the "point of no return" is passed. In the current situation only appeals for an armed uprising, preparations for it, and the armed uprising itself, can be considered useful manifestations of patriotism and nationalism.[190]

According to Soberminded, the 'military terrorist organisations,' the bombers of [the terrorist group] SPAS, the fighters of BORN, and the numerous groups of 'skinheads with sharp knives' constituted preparations for such an uprising, 'training for the great deeds to come.' These violent men were not merely 'the armed wing of Russian nationalism'; they were Russian nationalism. Scorning the impotent posturing of legal nationalists, Soberminded acknowledged only two forms of public activity. The first was the kind of 'rights-defence' agitation that aided imprisoned neo-Nazi combatants. The second was a probable allusion to Russkii Obraz: 'a nationalist lobby group that is trying to exert influence on the organs of power' and whose efforts represented 'a good beginning.' Nevertheless, the decisive force today were the insurgents, the 'malicious Russians' with

'sharp teeth who were prepared to tear to shreds the enemies of Russians, to stab, to bomb, and to shoot.' Soberminded suggested that at the core this violence lay a conspiracy of army officers, who were enraged by Markelov's prosecution of Russian war criminals in Chechnya. These officers had created a Russian version of OAS, the secret organisation of French army officers whose terrorist campaign against withdrawal from Algeria had been analysed in *Russkii Obraz* journal. Whether this hypothetical organisation had assumed the name of BORN was unclear. But Soberminded singled out BORN for praise. Its delivery of the head of a murdered Tadjik guest worker to the Mozhaisk administration building was 'the most effective action for bringing to the authorities the demands of Russian nationalists.' Like the assassination of Markelov, BORN's actions were evidence that Russian nationalism had launched a desperate counterattack. 'The millstone,' concluded Soberminded, 'is grinding slowly but faithfully.'[191]

Il'ya Goryachev was more publicly restrained, but no less enthusiastic about the progress of the millstone of terror. A week after the murders, Gorachev met Tikhonov at a café in Moscow's Taganskii district. According to Tikhonov, Goryachev 'was elated about what had happened.' His only reservation was that BORN had not yet claimed responsibility for the deed. Justifying his silence, Tikhonov explained that he did not want to tarnish the public image that he was creating of BORN as a popular avenger, a defender of indigenous Russians against non-Slavic diasporas and ethnic criminals. For Tikhonov, this image could not be reconciled with the 'political' war against Antifa and the killing of Markelov. The fact that Baburova, a Russian woman, had also died, was 'not the best recommendation for a defender of Russian interests.' Exasperated, Goryachev complained that such an approach would postpone the emergence of a Russian IRA.[192]

Despite Tikhonov's intransigence, a statement issued in the name of BORN about the deaths of 'these odious enemies of the Russian nation' was soon circulating on the internet. Warning that the killings of Filatov, Markelov and Baburova were 'our last warning to every anti-Russian rights-defender, journalist, anti-fascist, cop, and bureaucrat,' it demanded an end to 'Russophobia in the streets, in the media, and in judicial institutions.' Otherwise the killings would continue: 'henceforth none of the enemies of the Russian people are safe.'[193] Unlike BORN's first press-release, which provided photographic evidence of the authors' connection to the crime, this new statement failed to resonate. It was ignored by major media outlets, including *Novaya Gazeta*.[194] Even the neo-Nazi site, NSWAP, took over month to post it, apologising that 'by an oversight, several administrators [of the site] missed this letter, which was received at our email address.'[195] Tikhonov suspected that this fabrication was the work of either of his friend Aleksandr Parinov or of Sergei Golubev, the head of Blood & Honour/ Combat 18.[196]

'Total mobilisation against communism and capitalism'

The unfolding terror campaign had no impact on Russkii Obraz's collaboration with pro-Kremlin youth organisations. In the spring of 2009, Maksim Mishchenko used his status as a Duma deputy to transmit demands to state institutions from

Russkii Obraz. One of the most important was a request to the Moscow Prosecutor's Office to reverse a decision made by a local police station to close an investigation into an alleged attack on Ekaterina Skachevskaya, the sister of the imprisoned leader of a notorious neo-Nazi gang.[197] A few weeks later, activists from Russkii Obraz and Mishchenko's RuMol travelled to Serbia for the commemorations of the 10th anniversary of the outbreak of the Kosovo War. Addressing a crowd in Belgrade's Republic Square, Mishchenko found an excuse to reiterate his anti-Orangist message. The main danger facing both Serbia and Russia, he declared, was NGOs acting as conduits of Western interests. Lending its own peculiar interpretation to these words, Russkii Obraz noted in its report on the trip that the ouster of Milošević had led to the creation of a Ministry for Minority Rights, which lobbied for gay parades 'and every kind of rights for various perverts.' A similar fate awaited Russia, it warned, if the liberal opposition triumphed over the regime.[198]

Russkii Obraz's growing cooperation with the authorities guaranteed official approval of the 'Russian First of May,' the first major public event that it organised on its own. Under the slogan 'Total mobilisation against communism and capitalism,' some 350 activists marched from the VDNKh exhibition complex to Ostankino television station.[199] Unlike at the heavily policed 'Russian March,' the authorities took no preventive measures. Participants were neither searched nor required to pass through metal detectors. Instead, the police facilitated the procession, stopping traffic for the marchers as they proceeded along the route.[200]

What distinguished the Russian First of May from typical ultranationalist events was the organisers' efforts to project an image of harmless merry-making. Instead of the displays of aggression and raised arm salutes that lent an air of menace to many ultranationalist functions, there was a surreal, carnival-like atmosphere. Fluttering alongside the usual white-yellow-black nationalist flags and Russkii Obraz banners were to be found the flags of Transdniester, Wales, Texas and the US Confederacy. To the accompaniment of drummers, the marchers chanted a medley of uplifting and comical slogans: 'Youth! *Rus'*! Revolution! Sport! Health! Nationalism! Chuck Norris! Freedom to Texas!'[201] Equally bizarre was the reaction of the marchers to Galina Kozhnevnikova, SOVA Center's leading expert on radical nationalism, whose monitoring reports were the subject of obsessive commentary on Russkii Obraz's community website.[202] When the marchers spotted her observing them at the roadside, they began to chant, 'Glory to Galina Kozhevnikova!'[203]

Like other Russkii Obraz events, this apparently good-natured spectacle transmitted different messages to different audiences. For the general public and his Kremlin patrons, Goryachev portrayed the march as a demonstration of Russkii Obraz's support for the struggles of fraternal peoples 'against world imperialism, against the yoke of NATO and globalisation.'[204] To the neo-Nazi subculture, the Russian First of May communicated a more sinister message. Like the previous Russian March, the procession was led by drummers dressed in IRA military fatigues, a coded signal that terror remained part of Russkii Obraz's political arsenal. No less menacing was the cohort of militants from the 'Black Bloc,' masked 'autonomous nationalists' who were understood to be engaged in some kind of direct action.[205] In a cryptic statement released after the march, Dmitrii Taratorin

portrayed the event as a test of the ability of Russkii Obraz's most dedicated supporters to decipher coded signals:

> We wanted to observe how many people really understand us, how many do not need an explanation. For us, the First of May mobilisation was not a 'general conscription' but the mobilisation of those who could now become a nucleus. We were pleased by the results.

Taratorin promised that, with the passage of time, more would be revealed about Russkii Obraz's concealed ideology. For the moment, he contrasted Russkii Obraz's 'path of hope' with the terrorists' 'path of despair.' Even this apparent call for moderation was tempered by a menacing caveat. If the regime failed to provide political representation to national socialists, he warned, 'it will make terror inevitable.'[206] In other words, the threat of neo-Nazi terror was a lever for the legalisation of Russkii Obraz.

Several weeks after the Russian First of May, Russkii Obraz was at the forefront of agitation against a 'Gay Parade,' which had been proposed to coincide with Russia's hosting of the Eurovision Song Contest on 16 May 2009.[207] In a position paper, Dmitrii Taratorin exhorted all rightists to rally around an 'Anti-Sodomite Front' that would unite Orthodox militants and ultranationalists. The struggle against homosexuality, he contended, was a cause that highlighted the gulf between liberal ethics, founded on human rights, and rightist ethics, founded on duty.[208] Rank-and-file militants of Natsional'nyi Stroi ('National Formation'), a subsidiary organisation of Russkii Obraz, took their prejudices to the streets with a sticker campaign. One placard proclaimed: 'Eurovision = gay lobby. Keep Moscow clean.' Another warned: 'Homosexuality = disease. Don't permit its spread! Keep Moscow healthy.' The action was announced with a post on Russkii Obraz's community website titled 'Kill pederasts.'[209] The campaign was amplified by Dmitrii Steshin's newspaper *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, which anointed Il'ya Goryachev the 'public coordinator of the opponents of the gay parade.' To lend substance to that title, it quoted his quip that in ancient Rome, parades were held to celebrate a victory, but 'I don't recall in what battle we lost Moscow to the gays.'[210] In fact, the Eurovision 'gay parade' was chimerical. The only people who paraded on the streets of Moscow that day were a massive OMON contingent and dozens of 'anti-Sodomite' zealots.[211] That anti-climax highlighted Russkii Obraz's skill in capturing publicity by latching onto a prominent media story.

Conclusion

Russkii Obraz's transformation from a private club of young neo-Nazis into a Kremlin-backed public organisation had major repercussions for the politics of Russian nationalism. Goryachev and his friends played a key role in disrupting the emerging 'Orangist' coalition between radical nationalists and national liberals. A year after Aleksandr Belov launched his campaign for 'nationalism with velvet gloves,' his leadership of DPNI became untenable. Under the pressure of

criminal prosecution, Belov formally resigned on 29 April 2009.[212] One of the most seasoned experts on the far-right scene, Galina Kozhevnikova of SOVA Center, observed in her quarterly report that DPNI was losing its audience to Russkii Obraz, which managed both to project a more radical image and to boast about its ability to lobby in Duma.[213] This was high praise for Goryachev, who immediately posted Kozhevnikova's words on the community blog.[214]

In many ways, Belov's defeat was a vindication of the Kremlin's wager on Russkii Obraz, which now expanded its influence over the DPNI's constituency. On the internet, in the streets, and in the controlled public sphere, Russkii Obraz had become a force that its rivals needed to reckon with. The secret of Russkii Obraz's success was its duality, its readiness to work with Kremlin curators and to collaborate with the most extreme elements of the neo-Nazi underground. For Kremlin supervisors of 'managed nationalism' like Nikita Ivanov, Russkii Obraz's extremism may have seemed purely instrumental. By staking out a claim to more radical territory than its rivals, Russkii Obraz was helping the Kremlin both to pacify radical nationalism and to harness it for 'anti-Orangist' purposes. The problem was that Il'ya Goryachev's support for direct action was much more than posturing. He had become the central node in the segment of *sistema* that implemented 'managed nationalism,' a network of informal connections that extended from functionaries of the Presidential Administration to the killers of BORN.

Notes

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3 Yulia Taratuta, 'Vedushchii vmeste,' *Kommersant"*, 22 February 2008, p.7.
4 For an example of this optimism, see Marina Litvinovich's article, 'Bol'shinstvo peremen,' 20 October 2009, http://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2009/10/20_a_3274924.shtml (accessed 10 January 2014).
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5 Propagandist of the partisans

> Our main enemy is not the alien occupiers, but the traitors to the race and the nation, who are ruling the country. Without treason by those in power, [foreign] occupation would not have been possible.
>
> – 'Strategy 2020,' manifesto written by Nikita Tikhonov with assistance from Il'ya Goryachev[1]

Dmitrii Taratorin had promised in his May Day statement that the secret tenets of Russkii Obraz's ideology would gradually be revealed. During the summer of 2009, he and his comrades disclosed one of the most radical of these tenets: Russkii Obraz's support for the campaign of terror waged by the neo-Nazi 'underground' in Russian cities and towns. This support was expressed both through activism and through propaganda. On the level of activism, Russkii Obraz provided legal assistance and financial support for imprisoned neo-Nazi killers and their families. On the level of propaganda, it waged a public campaign to glorify the neo-Nazi underground. Its centrepiece was a two-hour documentary film that was both a celebration and a vindication of revolutionary terror.

This public alignment with the neo-Nazi underground should have triggered alarm bells in the Presidential Administration. In fact, Russkii Obraz's supervisors appear to have been unperturbed by its extremism. They continued to use Russkii Obraz as an instrument for manipulating radical nationalist politics. During the second half of 2009, they collaborated with Goryachev to develop the 'Ermolov Project,' a campaign against ethnic diasporas that was designed to consolidate Russkii Obraz's occupation of the political territory vacated by the disintegrating DPNI. Senior Kremlin officials also negotiated and approved the terms of Russkii Obraz's major event for the Day of National Unity, a rally and a concert by far-right bands in Bolotnaya Square, within earshot of the Kremlin.

Unfortunately for its official patrons, Russkii Obraz's rhetorical extremism was only the tip of the iceberg. At the height of his collaboration with Kremlin, Goryachev was in almost daily communication with Nikita Tikhonov, the leader of BORN. From their electronic correspondence, it is clear that they were partners in a kind of revolutionary project. Tikhonov offered advice about Russkii Obraz's regional branches and commented on Goryachev's news about dealings with the Presidential Administration.[2] In turn, Goryachev arranged for Russkii Obraz's head of security, Egor Gorshkov, to provide Tikhonov with knife-fighting lessons.

Even though Tikhonov was living as a fugitive, Goryachev's dealings with him were surprisingly open. In June 2009, Tikhonov even accompanied Goryachev to the headquarters of Rossiya Molodaya, the pro-Kremlin youth organisation, where they met Leonid Simunin, one of Russkii Obraz's semi-official curators. Undoubtedly Goryachev's recklessness was encouraged by his cooperation with the authorities. 'Why don't I fear the MVD and FSB?' he asked a female friend in a text message. 'Because I have good connections with the Presidential Administration.'[3]

The extent of these connections put the supervisors of managed nationalism on a collision course with the security apparatus. While Goryachev was negotiating the terms of Russkii Obraz's performance in Red Square, the FSB and the Investigative Committee were closing in on Nikita Tikhonov. By digital surveillance, bugging devices, and a clever provocation, the investigators assembled incontrovertible evidence of Tikhonov's involvement in the murder of Markelov and Baburova. In the process, they also constructed a compelling case against Il'ya Goryachev as Tikhonov's accomplice.

The Killers

Russkii Obraz's campaign in support of the neo-Nazi 'partisans' became the most publicised political manifestation of the crescendo of racist violence on the streets of Russian cities during the second half of the 2000s. Between 2004 and 2008, SOVA Center's monitoring recorded a steady increase in the number of victims, overwhelmingly immigrants and guest workers from Central Asia and the Caucasus.[4]

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Injured	218	419	522	618	486
Killed	50	49	66	89	109

The media response to this carnage was a mixture of alarmism and apathy. On one occasion, *Moskovskii komsomolets* headlined an article, 'Neofascists are capturing Moscow.' Reporting on the latest attack, it commented that 'skinheads are killing people on the streets in an organised and relaxed way.'[5] Other newspapers downplayed the violence as part of the routine of life in major cities. In a news item about the stabbing of two Chinese students by skinheads in March 2008, *Vechernyaya Moskva* observed that 'such attacks have become a common occurrence and are committed several times a week in the capital.'[6]

What magnified the scale and intensity of the violence was the transformation of the neo-Nazi milieu. During the 2000s, monolithic movements like RNE, the major neo-Nazi organisation of the 1990s, were supplanted by a proliferation of tiny, autonomous groups. Instead of a vertical hierarchy, these groups were connected by horizontal networks. Instead of military discipline and enforced conformism, they were distinguished by spontaneity and diversity. Instead of visible organisational structures, like a headquarters and registered publications, they functioned as covert, informal groups of individuals. These innovations helped

to radicalise the neo-Nazi underground in three ways. First, it became less susceptible to repression, because the membership of each gang was unknown to the others. Second, there was more opportunity for initiative, experimentation, and specialisation. Third, there were fewer opportunities for nationalist politicians to exert a restraining influence on violent elements. As it expanded, this network enabled disparate and scattered groups of killers to become a systemic phenomenon. They shared an ideology, a repertoire of tactics, and a consciousness of participating in a larger struggle.

The backbone of the neo-Nazi underground was the internet. As an arena for the airing of grievances and the rationalisation of prejudices, the internet helped to indoctrinate new recruits and to kindle the motivation of experienced fighters. Many websites incited racist violence by dehumanising the victims, normalising violence, and glorifying the perpetrators as 'partisans and warriors.' As a mechanism for sharing information, the internet also enabled geographically dispersed groups of fighters to learn from each other's experiences, coordinate their actions, identify potential victims, and develop repertoires of violent action. As a repository of visual media, the internet prepared fighters by desensitising them with graphic images of racist violence. Particularly sinister were interactive websites, which encouraged perpetrators to boast about their crimes and to compete with rivals by uploading photographs and video recordings of attacks. For those caught by the police, there was a cluster of 'rights-defence' websites, which portrayed neo-Nazi 'prisoners of conscience' as innocent victims of a Russophobic state.

One of the most important platforms of the neo-Nazi underground was the website NS-WP (National Socialism/White Power). Avoiding suppression by constantly shifting between servers, NS-WP existed from 2006 to 2008. Created by Moscow admirers of the St. Petersburg 'military terrorist group' headed by Dmitrii Borovikov and Aleksei Voevodin, it featured neo-Nazi propaganda documents alongside recommendations about methods of racist terror. It also hosted a gruesome collection of images and video footage of assaults and murders. Its slogan was: 'Kill blacks [*churok*]: It's fun, fashionable, sportive.'[7] There is no doubt that NS-WP's discussion forum played a crucial role in the recruitment and radicalisation of neo-Nazi youth. One of the most lethal neo-Nazi gangs, the White Wolves, coalesced during online chat between visitors to the site.[8]

Another pioneer of internet-instigated racial violence was Severnoe Bratstvo ('Northern Brotherhood'), a group of pagan ultranationalists who had broken away from DPNI. Like several of its rivals, Severnoe Bratstvo was connected to elements of the security forces. Its creation was instigated by Valerii Vdovenko, the former KGB officer who had made a career out of fabricating a succession of nationalist projects. Behind the scenes, he was a major figure in both the Russian–American University and Rodina.[9] As an organisation, Severnoe Bratstvo was dominated by two figures. Its ideologue and figurehead was Petr Khomyakov ('Dr. Evil'), a veteran nationalist militant and a former researcher at the Institute of Systems Analysis at the Russian Academy of Sciences. Khomyakov crafted Severnoe Bratstvo's manifesto, Programme NORNA (an acronym for 'National Liberation of the Russian People'). This apocalyptic document announced the impending collapse of both the Russian state and of human civilisation, which would require

ethnic Russians to prepare for a desperate struggle for survival against their racial adversaries.[10] This task was undertaken by Severnoe Bratstvo's other leader, Anton Mukhachev ('Fly'), a businessman, former skinhead and husband of the prominent neo-Nazi blogger Ol'ga Kas'yanova ('Matil'da Don'). Mukhachev supervised the group's internet project, 'The Great Game. Break the System,' which was launched in 2007. The 'game' required 'players' to perform 'assignments,' acts of racial violence that ranged from puncturing the tyres of an immigrant's car to arson and murder.[11] A typical assignment was 'the throwing of a powerful firework into the kiosk of an interloper [*prishelets*], with the scenario that the door has been blocked.'[12] To score points and win virtual money, players had to upload a video recording of each incident onto the website. Only in August 2009 did the FSB arrest Mukhachev and shut down the 'Great Game.'[13]

The proliferation of neo-Nazi hate sites coincided with an escalation of violence and an increase in the number of lethal attacks. For some neo-Nazi gangs, the aim was no longer merely to terrorise but to exterminate the racial enemy, the 'occupiers.' In March 2008, the shift was noted by Semyon Charnyi, an analyst at the Moscow Bureau for Human Rights, who attributed the soaring death toll to 'the appearance in Russia of gangs that specialise in killing.'[14] These groups were increasingly indiscriminate in their choice of victims. Attacks on women and children were no longer exceptional but regular occurrences.[15]

The destructiveness of the new autonomous groups was exemplified by the Ryno-Skachevskii gang, a group of adolescents who murdered at least 19 people of 'non-Slavic appearance' between August 2006 and April 2007. Members of the gang met regularly in quiet districts of Moscow, where they hunted and killed non-Europeans with shocking brutality. The group's trademark was multiple stab wounds that left victims virtually unrecognisable. The ringleaders were Artur Ryno, a student of icon-painting, and Pavel Skachevskii, a student at the Russian University of Physical Education.[16] They were assisted by seven others who intermittently joined the gang's nocturnal forays. What enabled the gang to avoid arrest for so long was the fact that its members lacked the visible attributes – shaven heads and neo-Nazi tattoos – of Moscow's skinhead milieu. But they were linked to the neo-Nazi underground by personal connections and their self-perception. Skachevskii boasted that he was a 'Russian soldier… who cleansed the city of occupiers.'[17]

The gang's killing spree was halted not by a concerted police operation but almost by accident. On 17 April 2007, Ryno and Skachevskii were arrested after they had fatally stabbed an Armenian businessman outside his apartment building.[18] Confronted by close-circuit video footage of the murder, Ryno boasted that he had committed many more. At first, his interrogators were sceptical, but he provided a mass of detail that was soon confirmed by crime reports in police databases. A search of Ryno's computer led the investigators to the other members of the gang.[19] Neither Ryno nor Skachevskii showed remorse at their trial in 2008. Because they were minors at the time of their crimes, both escaped life sentences and received the maximum possible term of ten years' incarceration.[20]

The Ryno-Skachevskii gang was the most notorious example of the rampant neo-Nazi violence during Putin's second term, but it was far from alone. Even

more murderous was a splinter group of the NSO (National-Sotsialisticheskoe Obshchestvo, National Social Society), the neo-Nazi organisation headed by Dmitrii Rumyantsev, who had ambitions of emulating Hitler's electoral path to power.[21] Like Russkii Obraz, NSO operated at the intersection between nationalist politics and the neo-Nazi underground. It consisted of a legal political organisation, which had competed in local elections in Moscow region, and a paramilitary structure, which was notorious for its highly militarised training camps.[22] This was an unstable compound. When NSO imploded in 2008, one of its leading militants, the veteran skinhead Maksim Bazylev ('Adol'f') became the ideological guru of a violent successor organisation, NSO-Sever (NSO-North). Bazylev was the reputed author of 'Instructions for Street Terror,' a viciously racist compendium of tactical advice about how to stalk and murder non-whites in Russian cities without being caught.[23] Putting theory into practice, the 15 young men of NSO-Sever committed at least 27 murders, including 24 that were racially-motivated, between the autumn of 2007 and the summer of 2008.[24] Like the Ryno-Skachevskii gang, NSO-Sever achieved this toll by stalking victims in poorly policed suburbs on the outskirts of Moscow. For new recruits, murder became a kind of initiation ritual, an 'exam' to prove their trustworthiness.[25] This carnage was brought to an end in the summer of 2008, when a large contingent of Interior Ministry troops and FSB officers stormed NSO-Sever's headquarters in the village of Pod"yachevo in Moscow region.[26] After a year-long trial of 13 militants, a military court sentenced 5 ringleaders to life imprisonment; 7 others received terms ranging between 10 and 23 years.[27] Bazylev himself died in Moscow's main investigation prison, as a result of suicide according to the official account, on 27 March 2009.[28]

The violence of the autonomous groups appeared to be random and uncoordinated. Under interrogation, Konstantin Nikiforenko, a member of NSO-Sever, recounted the crude ineptitude of one episode in its history of racist terror:

> In the winter of 2008, I and Vlad Tamamshev attacked a man who resembled a *churka* [a pejorative term for non-white] near Yaroslavskii highway. We asked for a cigarette, he answered that he didn't smoke. Then Tamamshev stabbed him three times in the throat and I stabbed him in the back. On the Internet, I discovered that the victim was Russian, his name was Maksim Kostikov.[29]

In their choice of location, however, some autonomous groups were quite purposeful. In 2008, many attacks took place in districts of Moscow where police had arrested skinheads the previous day.[30] In the process, the attackers were not only striking at their imagined racial enemies but also against the state. They were reminding local police officers that their territory was contested and that repression would not save the 'occupiers.' The frequency of these reprisals was also evidence of the increasing coordination and organisational sophistication of skinhead networks. Thanks to the internet, once scattered and disparate groups were now engaged in a common struggle.

No less ominous for the authorities was the increasingly destructive weaponry in the arsenal of the neo-Nazi underground. While skinhead gangs at the turn

of the millennium had relied upon knives, some autonomous groups acquired small arsenals of pistols, automatic weapons, and even grenade launchers. Others mastered bomb-making skills. This technological breakthrough was signalled on 21 August 2006 by the double blast at Cherkizovskii market, a long-standing object of nationalist resentment because of the predominance of Asian traders. 14 people were killed and 61 injured.[31] The victims included not only Vietnamese and Tadjiks but also local Russians.[32] This atrocity was the work of young members of SPAS, a 'military-patriotic club,' which was headed by the skinhead Nikolai Korolev and an FSB warrant officer, Sergei Klimuk.[33] Between April and August 2006, SPAS staged at least nine bombings of targets that ranged from newspaper offices to a Muslim prayer room, a dormitory, and a gambling machine venue.[34]

Other groups emulated SPAS's example. In 2008, there were at least ten bombings or attempted bombings linked to ultranationalists in Moscow and Moscow region, a significant increase since the previous year.[35] Four of these attacks were the work of the 'Biryulev bombers,' a small group of neo-Nazi pagan adolescents headed by a 17-year-old girl, Evgeniya Zhikhareva. This group committed ten murders before it began to explore the use of explosives as a tool of terror. Although its targets included railway tracks, a church, and a MacDonald's restaurant, the detonations caused no fatalities before Zhikhareva and her accomplices were arrested in January 2009.[36] Another potential bombing campaign was brought to a halt by an explosion in an apartment building on Moscow's Academician Korolov Street, which killed three people, and evoked memories of the apartment bombings of 1999. The principal suspect was one of the victims: Kirill Shiryaev, an 18-year-old activist of the Movement against Illegal Immigration (DPNI). Shiryaev's 'LiveJournal' blog contained chilling entries about race war and the need to exterminate Asians.[37] At the outset, the Moscow authorities blamed the tragedy on Shiryaev's use of a gas cylinder to weld armour for re-enactments of medieval battles.[38] By the end of the year, however, officials conceded that a homemade bomb had detonated.[39]

Solidarity with Rightist Political Prisoners

Russkii Obraz's first signal of its support for the neo-Nazi underground was the establishment of Russkii Verdikt ('Russian Verdict'), a 'rights-defence centre' dedicated to the protection of 'rightist' prisoners.[40] In a travesty of rights-defence rhetoric, Russkii Verdikt classified skinhead gang leaders, perpetrators of racially-motivated murder, and neo-Nazis convicted under the anti-extremism law as 'prisoners of conscience,' a term coined by the founder of Amnesty International to describe the imprisonment of peaceful dissenters who did not advocate violence.[41] This inversion of categories became the standard line of the project's coordinator, Aleksei Baranovskii, a mercurial figure whose militancy had taken him from the anti-Orangist, neo-Stalinist outfit, Krasnyi Blitskrig ('Red Blitzkrieg') to DPNI, Rogozin's Congress of Russian Communities, and ultimately to Russkii Obraz.[42] Legal expertise was provided by Aleksandr Vasil'ev, a lawyer who had made his reputation defending the notorious skinhead leader, Maksim 'Tesak' Martsinkevich.[43]

The new initiative was launched in a blaze of publicity around a new 'Day of Solidarity with Rightist Political Prisoners' on 25 July 2009. The date marked the seventh anniversary of the adoption of anti-extremism legislation under which numerous far-right militants had been prosecuted. To inscribe the commemoration on the nationalist calendar, Russkii Obraz deployed all the resources of its network to advertise fundraising events around the country. The highlight was a benefit concert in Moscow by Khuk Sprava and other ultranationalist bands.[44] To remind sympathisers that the cause was more than charity, the advertised events of the day included a training session for militants by Roman Zentsov, a martial arts champion who headed Soprotivlenie ('Resistance'), a far-right organisation based in St. Petersburg. In its report on the event, Russkii Obraz boasted that 'by training, you will not allow the enemy to take you prisoner.'[45] The clear implication was that the enemy was the state. The point was underlined by the launching of balloons outside Moscow's Butyrka prison in support of five neo-Nazis, including the mass murderer Pavel Skachevskii, incarcerated behind its walls. In its report, Russkii Obraz paid tribute to the prisoners as 'political soldiers.' In the process, it removed any lingering doubts about the meaning of one of this key term in its ideological lexicon.[46] 'Political soldiers' were not merely dedicated militants, but perpetrators of racist murders.

The challenge posed to the state by Russkii Obraz's campaign was dramatised by a riot that erupted at a premier league soccer match between Lokomotiv and Dinamo. Police intervened after a group of fans raised a banner emblazoned with the slogan, 'Prisoners of conscience, you are not forgotten,' and the names of Russkii Verdikt and another neo-Nazi 'rights-defence' organisation, Belaya Pamyat' (White Memory). When the fans repulsed a policeman who attempted to tear down the banner, OMON riot police were deployed to restore order.[47] Goryachev denied any direct connection to the incident. 'This was a networked action,' he told a journalist. 'Everyone prepared autonomously.'[48] In fact, the commotion may have been instigated by Russkii Verdikt's Aleksei Baranovskii, who had contacts in football gangs.[49]

Far less media attention was attracted by Russkii Obraz's most explicit and elaborate affirmation of its support for neo-Nazi fighters, the documentary film *Russkoe Soprotivlenie* ('Russian Resistance'). A joint production between Russkii Obraz, its subsidiary Russkii Verdikt and Belaya Pamyat,' *Russkoe Soprotivlenie* was released on the Day of Rightist Political Prisoners, when DVD copies were distributed to concert goers and public showings were held in several towns.[50] The film constituted compelling evidence that Russkii Obraz was linked, both ideologically and socially, to the neo-Nazi underground. Two hours in duration, packed with information and interviews, the film left no doubt that its creators supported the underground and were deeply involved in its internal debates.

In the opening credits, the film claimed to be nothing more than 'a journalistic investigation.' Its authors 'did not call for the committing of any kind of illegal actions, including the incitement of inter-ethnic, racial, religion, or any other kind of conflict.'[51] Despite the disclaimer, this 'journalistic investigation' was far from a detached analysis. In fact, it was at once propaganda and a kind of users' guide for aspiring militants. It celebrated murderers of immigrants as defenders of the

Motherland. It set out information to help them in their struggle with the law enforcement organs. It provided a platform for neo-Nazi ideologues to make the case for the legitimacy of revolutionary terror. To make the film's content more attractive to young skinheads, the soundtrack was dominated by songs from Russian neo-Nazi bands and martial music from European far-right composers.

The term 'partisan' was central to the film. Uncritically used by the voice-over and in subtitles, the term served to obscure both the criminality and the Nazi ideology of the fighters. At regular intervals, the voice-over presented biographical sketches of exemplary 'Russian partisans': mass murderers like Maksim Bazylev, Nikita Senyukov, Nikita Korolev, and Pavel Skachevskii, whose deeds were recounted to the accompaniment of uplifting, martial music. Their struggle was contextualised by Aleksandr Sevast'yanov, the prominent ultranationalist ideologue, who reiterated the argument of his recent essay about the 'Russian Underground.'[52] In a relaxed, didactic tone, Sevast'yanov explained to viewers that partisans were a traditional defence mechanism of Russian society in times of troubles when weak rulers were incapable of repelling foreign incursions:

> There were as many partisans in Russia as there were invaders… We are an open country. We are protected neither by mountains nor by sea, by oceans. We are not an island, like some republics or empires. Unfortunately, malevolent invaders frequently entered our land, and took our land, our women, our property, and caused harm to our way of life. And whenever the state or the prince could not defend himself… the people rose up… It was so under the Polovtsyan Tatars… Remember how it was in Tolstoi's *War and Peace?* To say nothing of recent times, from 1941 to 1942 when all of Belarus and a third of Russia became partisan. It is a normal phenomenon in our history. Partisans saved Russia on many occasions, during the Polish invasion and the Swedish invasion and so on.[53]

In other words, neo-Nazi killers of isolated immigrant labourers were the heirs of the heroes who had confronted the military might of Napoleon's empire and the Wehrmacht. Nowhere did the film confront the fact that these 'partisans' were adherents of the same ideology that inspired Nazi Germany to devastate their homeland during the Second World War.

At the core of *Russkoe Soprotivlenie* was a debate about the relative merits of two kinds of violence. The first was violence against racial outsiders. The film's opening featured a rapid sequence of excerpts from television news reports about crimes committed by immigrant labourers from Central Asia and the Caucasus.[54] This provided the context for footage of an inflammatory speech by the 'Russian partisan' Maksim Bazylev ('Adol'f'), the neo-Nazi leader who had recently died in prison:

> There is ethnic expansion in our land and the replacement of our people with foreigners. Therefore, any form of resistance can only be welcomed. Terror, violence, bombings, murder. Anything is justified in the name of the nation.[55]

A more elaborate justification for the killing of immigrants was offered by 'Lightsmoke,' a prominent skinhead best known for his novel about his years of gang violence. 'Lightsmoke' contended that random reprisals against individual Caucasians were an effective strategy because they exploited the traditional values of Caucasian societies, where the principle of collective guilt – vengeance against the families of malefactors – served as a deterrent to criminality.[56]

This view was rejected by a series of far-right luminaries, who argued that random killings were a futile political strategy. One of the most authoritative was Ivan Mironov, the young nationalist activist who had been imprisoned for two years on suspicion of involvement in the attempted assassination of the liberal reformer Anatolii Chubais. According to Mironov, attacks on helpless Tadjiks were both ineffective and counterproductive. The killings would not stem the flow of immigrant labour, but they would inspire the victims to form their own self-defence militias. They would also tarnish the image of Russian nationalism in the eyes of the younger generation. Mironov's warning was interpreted as appeal for quietism by Aleksandr Sevast'yanov, who complained in a review that it contradicted the broad message of the film.[57] But Mironov clearly indicated that young fighters should not withdraw but preserve themselves for a struggle for power:

> We need to understand one thing: that changes in this country are inevitable and rather near. Therefore, one must be prepared, morally, physically, and intellectually. And the main thing is to meet those changes and participate in them, and not be a sad, melancholy, broken observer in Matrosskaya Tishina [prison].[58]

The point was reinforced by a quote from the LiveJournal blog of 'Sheney':

> Victory is priceless. And we will not spare lives in order to achieve it. But our actions on the path to it must not be transformed into a series of mass suicides. Reasonable and considered direct actions are much more effective for our victory than a ruinous series of suicides… We are few and each of us is obliged to be a politician and a strategist. Everyone must extract the maximum from his struggle. Heroes are not those who depart early but those after whose departure the world changes.[59]

Most viewers would not have known that 'Sheney' was Evgeniya Khasis, a young neo-Nazi activist who worked as a volunteer for Russkii Verdikt. She was already deeply involved in the terrorist campaign being waged by her boyfriend, Nikita Tikhonov, the leader of BORN.

Other participants in the neo-Nazi underground confirmed the value of revolutionary violence. The footage of Maksim Bazylev's speech featured a forthright affirmation:

> Terror by the regime will attract Rightist Terror. There is nothing wrong with that. This regime, having failed to take account of the interests of the Russian people, will be forced to take account of bombers and fanatics.[60]

The point was reinforced by a long, scrolled excerpt from the first declaration of BORN, which warned that 'if [state] functionaries continue to populate Russia with foreigners, then we will have to begin exterminating functionaries.' Scholarly validation for the threat was provided by Aleksandr Sevast'yanov, who explained that 'already now, those people who order the importation of a foreign workforce, those who create laws under which partisans are persecuted, those who conduct a punitive policy, could suffer.' Speaking 'as a historian,' Sevast'yanov recalled the devastation wreaked by SR terrorists in the pre-revolutionary decades, and warned that an escalation of repression would provoke a spiral of violence that could end only in a full-scale civil war.[61]

Two members of Russkii Obraz offered implicit support for the underground's turn towards revolution. Echoing Bazylev, Il'ya Goryachev blamed state repression for the eruption of rightist terror. He proceeded to invoke the experience of the IRA to argue that ultranationalists imprisoned under articles of the criminal code would achieve recognition as political prisoners. 'Historical examples speak out only on our side,' concluded Goryachev. 'History shows that it is impossible to defeat a political soldier. He can only be legalised.'[62] The message was reinforced by a quote from the LiveJournal blog of Krig42, which was well-known to belong to Dmitrii Steshin, the prominent journalist and Russkii Obraz member. Krig42 referred to a recent statement by Aleksandr Verkhovskii, director of SOVA Center, about calls from some neo-Nazi groups to struggle against the state. According to Verkhovskii, the position of these groups was that 'You won't kill all the guestworkers, therefore, you need to struggle against the system.' Hiding behind a shroud of irony, Krig42 treated Verkhovskii's words as a guide to action: 'Dear hunters of guestworkers… Read what wise experts on extremism write to you… By listening to the advice of these people, you will bring the future nearer!'[63]

Russkoe Soprotivlenie was not only an act of incitement; it was also a kind of a survival manual for partisans still at liberty and for those who were considering taking up arms. Secretly filmed video enabled incarcerated neo-Nazis, whose faces and voices had been distorted, to offer advice about how to deal with the ordeal of capture. One prisoner, silhouetted against the bars of a cell, recommended total non-cooperation:

> if you have been arrested without incriminating evidence… then the best thing is to deny everything. Naturally, the investigators, the police, who conduct the initial interrogation, will pressure you with, 'we know everything about you, to prove your guilt will be very simple,' but of course, this is the usual bravado. It is best to deny everything because ultimately the court, at the trial, will rely on your initial testimony. And if your initial testimony was that you acknowledge your guilt, then it will be virtually impossible to wriggle out of it.[64]

Those arrested as a group engaged in a crime were advised to win time by invoking Article 51 of the Constitution, which enshrined the right not to give testimony. That would increase the chances that the detainees might be able to exchange enough information to fabricate a common story.[65]

There was also counsel for arrival in an investigative prison. A silhouetted prisoner stipulated that the first rule of survival was 'to speak as little as possible to cellmates.' Informers, he explained, might be disguised police, random inmates, or rightists who had been broken by their interrogators. The second rule was to ignore police threats to throw an uncooperative detainee into a cell with Georgians or drug addicts, where he would be brutalised and humiliated. 'Of course, this is all bravado,' explained the silhouetted figure. 'In prison everything is completely different, there is a completely different hierarchy, a completely different world, which is arranged against the *musor* [slang term for police].'[66]

The idea that the contemporary neo-Nazi 'partisans' were engaged in a war ran like a thread through *Russkoe Soprotivlenie*. Echoing the cult of the Great Patriotic War, the film portrayed fallen neo-Nazi partisans as selfless patriots who had laid down their lives for the greater good. In a concluding peroration, to the backdrop of a painting by Konstantin Vasil'ev of a dead Valkyrie and martial synthesiser music by the French far-right composer Dernière Volonté, the narrator proclaimed that the fallen had not died in vain:

> In this war, as in any other, there are many fallen warriors, who did not spare their lives for the sake of the future of our white children. Dmitrii Borovikov was shot in cold blood by St. Petersburg police. Maksim Bazylev died under unclear circumstances in [the Interior Ministry headquarters] at 38 Petrovka street. Roman 'Radio' perished in battle, in a struggle with foreign occupiers. The comrades of the fallen mourn the losses. But their cause will be continued. As the well-known song runs, 'We are condemned to win or die.' An obituary states that 'Roma Radio laid the foundations of rightist organised violence on the streets.' Dmitrii Borovikov was the first to embark openly on the path of armed resistance to alien occupation. The legacy of Maksim Bazylev remains to be studied by contemporaries. But it is understood that he was one of the best fighters of the Russian Resistance. Others have taken up their banner and will carry it to the last frontier. To win or die.[67]

This exhortation was followed by footage of a ceremony in an unspecified park in Moscow, where activists of Russkii Verdikt and Belaya Pamyat planted fourteen lilac trees to create an 'Avenue of Rightist Partisans.' Thirteen of the trees were dedicated to specific fighters 'who had fallen in different circumstances on the fronts of the undeclared war.' The fourteenth stood over 'the tomb of the unknown soldier' [and was] 'dedicated to all our departed comrades.'[68] The film's end titles began with a martyrology, a list of the names of 'fallen warriors,' to the accompaniment of the song 'The Future Belongs to Us' by the neo-Nazi band Russkii Styag (Russian Banner).[69]

Russkoe Soprotivlenie resonated in radical nationalist circles. A review in *Zavtra*, the nationalist broadsheet edited by Aleksandr Prokhanov, applauded the film for drawing attention to the 'radical Russian resistance, which has adopted the forms of the classic urban guerilla in conditions of information coercion, repression, and legal nihilism.'[70] In the blogosphere, the reaction was mixed. Some far-right militants welcomed the documentary as a major event. Natalya Kholmogorova, the

leading activist in the Russian Social Movement (ROD), praised the film-makers' high production standards and their contribution to the movement's self-awareness.[71] What was most important about *Russkoe Soprotivlenie*, argued 'Sgt Packy,' was the message that it sent to 'rightist youth.'[72] Others were alarmed by what the film revealed about the neo-Nazi underground. Noting that the film had set a record for downloads on torrents.ru, 'ingwar' was disconcerted by the parallels between the ideological fanaticism of its 'partisan' heroes and their terrorist predecessors in the pre-revolutionary period.[73] Harder to evaluate is its impact upon the secretive neo-Nazi underground, but there were some positive responses. Shortly before his arrest, one of the ringleaders of Northern Brotherhood, Anton Mukhachev ('Fly'), wrote a laudatory blog post about *Russkoe Soprotivlenie* (in which his wife, Ol'ga Kas'yanenko, had appeared).[74] Another admirer was Nikita Tikhonov, who texted Goryachev that 'I liked the film.'[75]

There was no doubt that *Russkoe Soprotivlenie* was a dangerous gamble. By endorsing neo-Nazi terror, Russkii Obraz risked prosecution for extremism and the forfeiture of its privileged position in the Kremlin's managed nationalism. At times, Goryachev was afraid that he had gone too far. On 4 August, he had an anxious discussion with Tikhonov about Mukhachev's 'worrying' arrest and whether the film should be made available on Russkii Obraz's website. Tikhonov warned his friend that 'this will be your acknowledgement that the film was shot by RO and that you are a leader of skinheads.' Goryachev pointed out that it was too late to deny responsibility: Russkii Obraz's role in the film was clearly stated on every DVD copy. Changing his tone, Tikhonov became apologetic, explaining that he did not want to be amongst those applauding Goryachev's audacity, when it would be Goryachev alone who suffered the consequences.[76] A week later, after a series of meetings with Kremlin intermediaries, Goryachev informed Tikhonov with obvious relief that 'the Leadership is not angry about the 25th [The Day of Rightist Political Prisoners] and the film.'[77]

The Path to Terror

While Russkii Obraz was waging its propaganda campaign in support of the 'partisans,' Tikhonov's gang was evolving into a leading force of the neo-Nazi underground. On an operational level, it killed new victims and its fighting capacity was augmented by the formation of a new cell of fighters, the 'northerners' (*severnye*). On an ideological level, Tikhonov began to codify the lessons of his life as a partisan in a kind of revolutionary manifesto, 'Strategy 2020,' which made the case for violent resistance to the regime. Goryachev's vision of a Russian Sinn Fein acting in tandem with a Russian IRA no longer seemed chimerical. He and Tikhonov were now partners in a political project backed up by acts of terror whose shockwaves reverberated across the country. In many ways, the two men complemented each other, but there were moments of tension between them. On at least one occasion, Goryachev's need to appease his Kremlin patrons led him to veto Tikhonov's plans for a new murder.

The catalyst for the expansion of BORN was the murder of Markelov and Baburova. After security camera footage of the fleeing perpetrator was broadcast

on television, Tikhonov's distinctive gait was recognised by a new acquaintance, Maksim Baklagin. A lawyer who moved in neo-Nazi circles, Baklagin had been introduced to Tikhonov by Korshunov. At their next meeting, Baklagin asked Tikhonov whether he had committed the murder and offered to help him. Admitting nothing, Tikhonov said that it was time for Russian nationalists to acquire firearms.[78] This conversation led directly to the formation of BORN's 'Northern Group.' In February 2009, Baklagin met a group of trusted schoolfriends in Dubna, a small town in Moscow region. He invited them to take up arms with him. Two refused, but Yurii Tikhomirov and Vyacheslav Isaev agreed to join him.[79]

BORN's next killing testified to the tension between Tikhonov the paramilitary leader and Goryachev the Kremlin proxy. A month after Markelov's murder, Goryachev's mood had shifted from euphoria to trepidation. 'He was alarmed,' Tikhonov recalled in his confession, 'that a great commotion had arisen at the top [of the regime] about these crimes.'[80] What particularly worried Goryachev was the thread connecting him to the murder of Filatov, whose address he had acquired from contacts in the police. To avoid adding to the incriminating evidence, Goryachev asked Tikhonov for a temporary suspension of attacks against Antifa militants. The proposed ceasefire conflicted with Tikhonov's plans to target Il'ya Dzhaparidze and Dmitrii Avalishvili, two Antifa leaders who had been accused on neo-Nazi websites of assaulting Ekaterina Skachevskaya, the sister of one of the imprisoned leaders of the Ryno-Skachevskii gang.[81] Despite his loathing of the Antifa movement, Goryachev was opposed to the hit. According to Tikhonov, Goryachev explained that 'he had been ordered from above not to attack Antifa anymore.'[82] Another reason for his caution may have been the fact that Russkii Obraz was publicly involved in the affair. Goryachev and Aleksei Baranovskii had interviewed Skachevskaya's husband about the circumstances of the attack. Russkii Obraz's own website boasted that the organisation had prompted Maksim Mishchenko, the Duma deputy who publicly collaborated with Russkii Obraz, to submit a parliamentary inquiry to the Prosecutor's Office, which had resulted in the reopening of the case.[83]

Goryachev's objections did not prevent Tikhonov from unleashing BORN's 'Northern Group' against Dzhaparidze. Tikhonov offered Dzhaparidze's address, which he had received from Goryachev, to Baklagin and Korshunov, telling them that they were welcome to deal with him but that he would not participate. For several weeks, the 'Northern Group' stalked Dzhaparidze, whose irregular movements made him an elusive target. Finally, on 27 June 2009, they encountered him outside his apartment. Yurii Tikhomirov shot the Antifa leader four times with a gas pistol, while Baklagin stabbed him. Dzhaparidze's body was found with 26 wounds, which Baklagin later attributed to a struggle over the knife. Unimpressed by the new recruits' performance, Korshunov said that Tikhomirov was 'not yet ready for murders.' But this first killing gave them credibility in Tikhonov's eyes. 'After the murder,' Baklagin testified in court, 'Tikhonov began to treat us more trustingly.'[84] Nevertheless, Tikhonov did not mark the occasion with a press statement from BORN. In court testimony, he explained that he was constrained by the fact that 'Goryachev had not given me an instruction for the

killing of Dzhaparidze.'[85] BORN was a kind of joint venture, but that did not prevent Tikhonov from outsourcing acts of retribution.

BORN's next target was the 'Black Hawks,' a gang of non-Slavic youths who had achieved national notoriety for a brutal assault on two Russian teenagers in the metro.[86] For Russian nationalists, the case became a cause celebre because of the Russophobic motives of the attackers. The two teenagers had been lured to a meeting on the social networking site, Vkontakte, by someone claiming to be a young Russian who was being harassed by Caucasians. When the pair came to the meeting on 6 May 2008, they were confronted by a cohort of fourteen 'Black Hawks,' who beat them while chanting 'Stab the Russian swine' and 'Allahu Akhbar!' Both victims suffered serious injuries. One was stabbed near the heart; the other was shot several times with a gas pistol. By filming the attack, the Black Hawks provided the prosecution with its most incriminating piece of evidence.[87]

They also ensured that the trial of seven alleged attackers in Moscow's Dorogomilovskii district court became a focus of heated discussion in Russian nationalist circles. A large crowd of militants, including such prominent figures as Dmitrii Demushkin and Natalya Kholmogorova, assembled outside the courtroom at the beginning of the hearings in May 2009. In the nationalist blogosphere, the trial received detailed and highly critical coverage.[88] One of the principal complaints was the fact that unlike many skinheads, the attackers had not been charged under the 'extremism' Article 282.2(a) of the Criminal Code, which treated racist motivation as an aggravating circumstance in violent assaults. Another was the fact that the assailants were not held in pre-trial detention.[89]

This circumstance offered BORN an opportunity. On 3 September, Mikhail Volkov, using a gun provided by Tikhonov, ambushed and shot dead one of the defendants, Rasul Khalilov, on his way to the courtroom.[90] Once again, BORN exploited the publicity surrounding a highly visible murder to level threats against the state. On this occasion, it proclaimed its contempt for a judicial system that permitted mass amnesties for Chechen insurgents but sentenced 'Russian political prisoners' to life imprisonment:

> Those with eyes see! The ruling regime is hostile to the Russian nation, and state judges are merely servants of the regime. We do not recognise their right to judge either our comrades or the enemies of our nation. Henceforth we ourselves are judges on our land, and there is no authority that can forbid us from defending the Russian people.[91]

Despite BORN's claim that 'everything was leading to an acquittal,' prison sentences of four to six years were ultimately handed down to the surviving 'Black Hawks.'[92] But BORN's vilification of the judiciary foreshadowed the widening of its range of potential targets to include judges like Eduard Chuvashov, its final victim. The statement concluded with an exhortation to 'the fighters of Russian resistance' to undertake 'pinpointed actions of vengeance': 'get firearms… [and] seek out those responsible for crimes before Rus' and punish them without mercy.'[93]

BORN's public profile was boosted one week later by a new statement, of dubious authenticity, which claimed responsibility for a bomb that had exploded outside the Kuntsevskii office of the Investigative Committee of the Procuracy (SKP) on August 26. The statement asserted that this 'demonstrative' action was designed to avoid casualties. The SKP was 'overwhelmingly made up of Slavs' and 'we have no wish to spill brotherly blood… even the most unworthy Russians.' But the statement was clearly intended to intimidate those 'people with Slavic faces and surnames who torture in interrogations, and kill captive Russian nationalists.' It singled out two martyrs for special mention: Dmitrii Borovikov, a leader of the St. Petersburg skinhead gang 'Mad Crowd' and the founder of a 'military terrorist organisation,' who was shot while resisting arrest in May 2006; and Maksim Bazylev, who died in police detention in March 2009. Proclaiming that 'our patience is at an end,' the statement announced the beginning of hostilities:

> We are all the more convinced that the regime will not change its policy of displacing Russian people in their own country with coloured immigrants. We had faced repression from henchmen with MVD uniforms and Investigative Committee identity cards. The anti-Russian regime forces us to launch a partisan war for the complete liberation of Rus' from the sway of traitors to the Nation and the accomplices of the coloured occupiers.

As evidence of BORN's seriousness, the statement concluded with a claim of responsibility for a blast in September 2008, which had destroyed a café frequented by Azerbaijani criminal identities. 'A decision had been taken to reduce the number of social parasites,' it concluded menacingly. 'When we desire it, our bombs kill.'[94] Unlike some of BORN's earlier press releases, this statement attracted considerable attention. Extensive quotations appeared in the mass-circulation newspaper *Moskovskii komsomolets*.[95]

In an attempt to provide a more elaborate justification for neo-Nazi terror, Tikhonov compiled a manifesto titled 'Strategy 2020.' This document, whose title alludes to President Medvedev's reform programme, was inspired by Tikhonov's conversations with Sergei Nikulkin, a former leader of OB-88 who was working for the pro-Kremlin youth organisation Mestnye. According to Tikhonov's confession, which have may been formulated in terms intended to exonerate his friend, Nikulkin had composed an exhortation to nationalist youth to abandon skinhead violence, which led only to prison, and to embark upon legal political struggle. By joining political parties and pro-Kremlin youth organisations, by gaining access to the levers of power, they would be able to halt the immigrant tide.[96] Aware of Tikhonov's journalistic experience, Nikulkin asked him to edit the draft. Instead, Tikhonov produced his own manifesto, 'Strategy 2020,' which advanced a diametrically opposed argument. In Tikhonov's text, nationalists would gain power not by collaboration but by revolutionary struggle, which would combine terror and information warfare.

Tikhonov's premise was that the Putin regime was the principal enemy of Russian nationalists:

> Our main enemy is not the alien occupiers, but the traitors to the race and the nation, who are ruling the country. Without treason by those in power, [foreign] occupation would not have been possible.[97]

'Strategy 2020' set out an analysis of the current regime as an alliance of two anti-national clans. First, there were Jewish oligarchs, financial structures like Mikhail Fridman's Alpha Group, which used their hirelings in the media to promote cosmopolitan values and the human rights of sexual and national minorities. Second, there were the *siloviki*, functionaries of the security apparatus who were infected by a 'Soviet patriotism' that blinded them to the racial threat posed by non-European immigration from ex-Soviet republics.[98] This double-headed regime, exploiting its stranglehold over the political system, had prevented nationalists from taking a peaceful, parliamentary road to power.[99] At the same time, it was seeking to crush the nationalist movement by sponsoring 'pseudo-nationalist projects' and by a crackdown on neo-Nazi youth.[100] The only option left to Russian nationalists was violent resistance.

The central contention of 'Strategy 2020' was that 'direct action' – arson, killings, and acts of terrorism – was both the essence of the nationalist movement and a road to power. The paramilitary fighters of the neo-Nazi underground, 'those of us who are engaged in the physical extermination of occupiers and traitors,' were the prime movers of the struggle.[101] At present they were little more than an irritant to the regime but they had the potential to topple it. To become a revolutionary force, fighters needed to 'devote maximum attention to their military skills.' On the one hand, 'every adult national-socialist must acquire a firearm and learn to use it better than police officers.' On the other, members of the 'newly created military terrorist organistions' needed to learn not only how to make bombs, 'but also to understand in cold blood: where and how best to use them.' This professionalisation of terror reflected the fact that 'the time of pogroms is long past; it is now a time of precision strikes against important targets.'[102]

Tikhonov conceded that the life of a paramilitary fighter was not for everyone. For those inhibited by scruples or cowardice, Strategy 2020 proposed other forms of 'direct action,' such as acts of arson directed against the shops and vehicles of non-Slavic immigrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia. This was an effective instrument of struggle because of its terrorising effect: 'probably, there is nothing more frightening for the sleeping "beasts" than being woken in their bedroom by fire and the sound of breaking glass.' Arson was also economically debilitating because an immigrant's car or minibus was often uninsured. Under conditions of economic crisis, many victims would be unable to recover from the loss.[103]

To magnify the impact of acts of violence, Tikhonov called for an 'information war' that would both demoralise the enemy and capture the imaginations of sympathisers. In this theatre of conflict, truth mattered less than appearances.

An unpublicised strike against the movement's enemies was a wasted effort. But once something became a media sensation, 'then it is already unimportant whether it was real or only published by the media.' To make society aware of their real and imaginary exploits, the paramilitaries needed the support of 'special information resources, which publicise our actions.' Every action had to be accompanied by a press release, which could then be disseminated across the rightist internet by sympathetic bloggers.[104] No less important was 'active approval and moral support' to those engaged in violent actions. By explaining and justifying these actions, rightist bloggers could quell the doubts of wavering sympathisers. Aleksandr Sevast'yanov's article about the partisans was extolled as 'the best model of this agitational work.'[105]

There were obvious similarities between the messages of 'Strategy 2020' and Russkii Obraz's film *Russkoe Soprotivlenie*. Both asserted the necessity of armed struggle; both glorified partisans as the vanguard of a national revolution. Like *Russkoe Soprotivlenie*, 'Strategy 2020' concluded with a promise of power:

> Now one can confidently say that our Movement is already the basis for the formation of a new political class capable of dominating its own country. Blood and pride in our origins determine our right to shape the future of our great Motherland. To uphold this right by direct actions and information war is the duty of every Russian nationalist.

What was missing from 'Strategy 2020' was any reference to Russkii Obraz. Indeed, Tikhonov's text complained that, unlike the IRA, Russian insurgents had no Sinn Fein, no legal organisation to support their struggle. Nevertheless, Goryachev played a role in the composition of 'Strategy 2020.' During his interrogation in April 2010, Goryachev conceded that he had discussed the text with Tikhonov on Skype. 'I tried to smooth it out, to add more, let us say, legal methods of struggle,' explained Goryachev in self-exculpation, 'but my amendments did not go into the final draft.'[106] Despite this disavowal, Goryachev's revolutionary vision left its imprint on that draft, which finally appeared after Tikhonov's arrest on the website of Sergei Golubev's Blood and Honour.[107] In his confession, Tikhonov explained that 'what had already been realised by Goryachev, myself, and those attracted by me, acquired theoretical reflection' in the manifesto.[108]

A node of the neo-Nazi subculture

As BORN gained momentum, so did Russkii Obraz. Since the Russian First of May, Russkii Obraz had become a force to be reckoned with in nationalist politics. Its growing confidence in the summer of 2009 was evident in a programmatic statement that boasted about its versatility, its power, and its mastery of political technology:

> Russkii Obraz is not a band, not a propaganda agency, and not a political party. We are all these things at once. And at the same time, our tasks and possibilities are rather wider than these formats. Russkii Obraz is capable of

> 'resolving questions' of any degree of complexity. We know how to create political projects from nothing, to guarantee the defence of those who need it, to conduct campaigns in the mass media, to uphold the rights of citizens, commercial and public structures.[109]

Evidence of its vigour could be found in three spheres of its activity. First, its inner core continued to function as a groupuscule within the far-right subculture, engaging in activities that reinforced Russkii Obraz's neo-Nazi identity. Second, its Moscow organisation launched a succession of new projects in defence of traditional values and healthy lifestyles that raised Russkii Obraz's public profile and fostered collaboration with the Orthodox Church. And third, it attracted a constant stream of new recruits into its growing network of regional branches. By the summer of 2009, 'RO Divisions' were active in Ekaterinburg, Irkutsk, Izhevsk, Kaluga, Rostov-on-Don, and St. Petersburg.[110]

Even as Russkii Obraz became a visible presence in the public arena, it remained one of the most active and connected nodes in the far-right subculture. As Goryachev had reflected in late 2008, 'we continue to be a subcultural organisation [but] are simply raising the subculture to a political level.' In practice, this meant that 'we have always had an open wing and a closed one – and this will continue.'[111] The closed wing comprised a core group of members, and a less engaged group of supporters. According to Goryachev's records from 2009, there were 23 core members and 11 supporters.[112] In Russkii Obraz's internal discussions, the core was glamourised as an 'Order,' the kind of militant elite that had been theorised by Taratorin in *Russkii bunt naveki*.[113]

The closed group was defined by a fixation on Nazi symbols and the history of the Third Reich. As a public movement, Russkii Obraz assiduously avoided displays of Nazi regalia and rituals.[114] For its subcultural groupuscule, however, Nazism served both as a focus of group identification and as a proof of radicalism. This process of self-definition was exemplified by a pilgrimage undertaken in August 2009 by four militants, including Il'ya Goryachev and Evgenii Valyaev, to the town of Lokot,' the administrative centre of Brasovskii district in Bryansk region, near the Ukrainian border. What attracted them was the memory of the Lokot' Republic, a semi-autonomous puppet regime that had existed under German protection from 1941 to 1943. For many Russian nationalists, Lokot' was a synonym for shameful treachery, but for Russkii Obraz, it was an opportunity to recover a Russian national-socialist tradition.[115] As Evgenii Valyaev explained on his blog, 'we needed to find places that linked the history of this settlement with the events of the years 1941–3.' According to Valyaev, the Lokot' Republic had a glorious past. Not only did it preside over an economic revival, an expansion of hospitals, and the restoration of churches, but under its aegis, 'the National Socialist Party of Russia was created and the process of forming a Russian government was begun.' Sporting Russkii Obraz's trademark death's head skull t-shirts, the four visitors toured the town and its environs. Unsurprisingly, they were treated with suspicion by locals. To Valyaev's disappointment, the traces of the Nazi past were dwarfed by the monumental remnants of the Soviet regime. Nevertheless, they visited three sites that figured in the history

of the republic: the horse-breeding farm, which served as a prison and execution grounds; a church that had functioned throughout the war; and a spirit factory, which had been constructed under the republic. To judge by Valyaev's reverent tone, he was satisfied with the visit. 'The spirit of the fighters,' he concluded, 'lives in this town because those who participated in these events are alive.'[116]

During the autumn of 2009, Russkii Obraz's group identification with Nazism was reinforced by a series of lectures on the origins of the Third Reich. The presenter was the amateur historian Vol'fgang Akunov, a notorious Nazi apologist, and the author of a series of works glorifying the heroism of the SS.[117] Some of his topics, such as the opening lecture on the Freikorps, had suggestive implications for Russkii Obraz's interaction with skinhead fighters. Others, such as the lecture on the Lokot' Republic, served to ground Nazism in Russian history. A lecture on the rise of the Nazi Party 'paid special attention' to the relationship between White Russian emigres and German national-socialism.[118]

A less cerebral manifestation of Russkii Obraz's subcultural life was a 'military-sporting camp' held in September 2009 at the estate of German Sterligov in Mozhaisk district of Moscow region.[119] Sterligov, a business magnate who had co-founded Russia's first commodities exchange, was well-known for his ultranationalist sympathies and his ultra-conservative religious convictions. The exact nature of his relationship with Russkii Obraz was murky. According to Evgeniya Khasis' court testimony, Sterligov was prepared to pay Goryachev for violence against homosexuals.[120] Whether the 'military-sporting' exercises on his estate were linked to this project is uncertain. What is clear is that the camp was much more than a summer diversion for harmless 'office plankton,' as one Russkii Obraz member tried to argue in court.[121] In Skype correspondence with the skinhead leader Sergei Golubev ('Oper'), Goryachev likened the event to 'a summer camp à la NSO.'[122] He was referring to Natsional-Sotsialisticheskoe Obshchestvo (NSO, National Socialist Society), one of Russia's most notorious neo-Nazi organisations, whose camps were well-known for providing military training to skinhead militants. One visitor to NSO's camp in 2008 reported that the programme included 'hand-to-hand fighting, the use of short-barrelled weapons in pistol duels, and an array of other interesting exercises.'[123] In response to Goryachev's boast about the camp, Golubev retorted that 'everything "à la NSO" ends badly.' When Goryachev claimed that NSO was preparing combatants and Russkii Obraz was doing 'team-building,' Golubev warned: 'Understand one thing: any such training will lead to extreme interest from the [security forces].'[124]

Goryachev ignored Golubev's advice. Like its model, Russkii Obraz's camp was highly militarised and regimented. The training was supervised by Sergei Gorshkov, a special forces veteran who headed Russkii Obraz's security team. After his arrest, Goryachev denounced Gorshkov as a 'shellshocked' fanatic who was determined to embark on armed struggle.[125] What he failed to explain was why such a dangerous individual was entrusted with the important task of organising a camp that could attract unwelcome attention from the law enforcement agencies. Certainly, the records of the camp reveal no tension between Goryachev and Gorshkov. One photograph featured Goryachev posing with an anti-personnel mine. Another showed him, surrounded by Russkii Obraz activists

in camouflage fatigues, pointing up at the carcass of a sheep hanging from a tree. It was an allusion, as Tikhonov later explained to the jury at Goryachev's trial, to photographs of members of the Ku Klux Klan posing below the hanging corpses of lynched black Americans.[126]

The summer camp was part of a broader programme of 'military-sporting' training conducted by Gorshkov during 2009. In internal discussion, it was named OBZh (Osnovy bezopastnosti zhiznedeyatel'nosti), a humorous reference to a school subject about safety in everyday life.[127] At Goryachev's trial, Evgenii Valyaev claimed that OBZh was an innocuous 'team-building' exercise.[128] Gorshkov himself insisted that he was teaching Russkii Obraz's security team nothing more than the maintenance of order at far-right concerts.[129] But Gorshkov's lessons went far beyond crowd control. Goryachev arranged for both Tikhonov and his girlfriend Evgeniya Khasis to have training sessions. According to Tikhonov's notes, Gorshkov's tuition included advice about surveillance and infiltrating apartment buildings under the guise of couriers and pizza delivery drivers.[130] There were also knife-fighting classes, which on one occasion resulted in an injury that left Tikhonov incapacitated for weeks.[131]

Soon after the summer camp, Russkii Obraz unveiled a new means for adherents to affirm their Nazi sympathies. The movement's clothing label, *Ratibor*, produced black t-shirts that became a kind of uniform for militants. They featured a death's head skull above the slogan, *'Moya chest' zovetsya Vernost''* ['My Honour Is Named Truth']. For most observers, the phrase was an empty platitude. To the initiated, however, it was a sign of allegiance to the Nazi legacy. As Evgenii Valyaev pointed out on the community's website, it was a translation of the German, 'Meine Ehre heisst Treue,' the motto of the SS.[132] The fact that an organisation called 'Russian Image' embraced such un-Russian symbolism elicited some scorn on the internet.[133] But Russkii Obraz activists who participated in a visit to Serbia also proudly reported an occasion when foreign rightists were unperturbed by their SS regalia.[134]

Crusading for Virtue

While the members of Russkii Obraz's subcultural core celebrated Nazism, its public spokesmen upheld traditional virtues and healthy lifestyles. This stance was rooted in the neo-fascist preoccupation with degeneration, a recurrent theme of Russkii Obraz's ideological pronouncements and the lyrics of its band, Khuk Sprava. On a political level, Russkii Obraz's morals crusade offered an opportunity to build alliances with Russian Orthodox militants. One mobilising cause was opposition to LGBT rights. Another was abortion, which was the subject of a coordinated campaign by eleven Russkii Obraz branches on 1 June 2009.[135]

Many of Russkii Obraz's interventions were carefully designed publicity stunts. In July 2009, the organisation exploited the hype surrounding the 'Jaga-Fest,' an open-air concert by leading rappers held on 17 July 2009 at Moscow's Bersenevskaya embankment. Jaga-Fest was sponsored by the makers of 'Jaguar,' a drink aimed at teenagers and young adults. In a statement, Russkii Obraz argued that 'Jaguar,' which combined stimulants and relaxants, represented a path to

alcohol abuse and long-term health problems. It exhorted supporters to come to the festival and 'to explain to the degenerates with cans of "Yagi" in their hands that their health does not only belong to them, but to the entire nation, and we will not permit them to kill the future of the nation.'[136] Like the campaign against the 'gay parade' two months earlier, the publicity was more important than the concrete measures undertaken by Russkii Obraz's agitators, which consisted of graffiti and a small action in Bolotnaya Square, near the festival grounds. According to Evgenii Valyaev, between 40 and 70 'normal people' conducted conversations with party goers.[137] The result was an eight-minute video, which opened with disturbing images of drunken youths, some of school age, holding cans of Jaguar. A roving interviewer then approached various young people consuming Jaguar in the square, warning one young woman that the drink could harm her fertility and promising another that she could become 'a hero of YouTube' by emptying the contents of her can.[138]

Russkii Obraz's campaign for sobriety clearly attracted positive attention in the Moscow Patriarchate, which was waging its own campaign against mixing alcohol and stimulants. In May 2009, the cocktails had been condemned in a resolution passed at the annual conference of the World Russian National Sobor, the Moscow Patriarchate's leading public forum for social and political discussion.[139] This resolution was part of the new patriarch's programme to engage with Russian youth. Amongst other things, this programme envisaged a dialogue with youth subcultures, which it praised as 'laboratories for social creativity.'[140] The possibility that the church's interlocutors would include radical nationalists was underlined by the Patriarch's meeting on 24 May with Aleksandr Zaldostanov ('Surgeon'), the leader of the nationalist bikie gang Nightwolves.[141] Five months later, representatives of Russkii Obraz were invited to join a new organ created under the aegis of the Sobor, the Expert Council of its Youth Discussion Club, which held its inaugural session on 6 October 2009.[142]

Even as it posed as a guardian of Christian values, Russkii Obraz was reaching out to pagans. In the summer of 2009, the organisation positioned itself as a defender of Russian culture against rapacious business interests by conducting a campaign to defend the museum of the painter Konstantin Vasil'ev (1942–76). For pagan and some far-right circles, Vasil'ev was a cult figure. His death in a railway accident was the subject of numerous conspiracy theories.[143] Vasil'ev's heroic, sometimes surreal canvases drew on Russian pre-Christian mythology, Scandinavian sagas, and Richard Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung. Underlying his interest in legend was a preoccupation with fascism. Many of his paintings incorporated Nazi symbolism in mythic or medieval scenes. In his revealing self-portrait, the artist poses in a brown shirt and tie, and his figure is superimposed onto the shadow of a medieval warrior.[144] In post-Soviet Russia, images from Vasil'ev's paintings were widely used in far-right publications and websites. At the same time, the Vasil'ev Museum became a kind of organising centre for neo-pagan cultural activities.[145] When both the premises and its collection came under attack from 'raiders,' criminal structures operating in collusion with corrupt officials, Russkii Obraz came to the rescue. 'To defend the cultural legacy of Konstantin Vasil'ev against the encroachments of venal con-men,' it assembled a

six-member organising committee, which included the prominent satirist Mikhail Zadornov, the nationalist writer Sergei Alekseev, and two representatives of Russkii Obraz.[146] To raise money for the campaign, Russkii Obraz also organised a music concert on 29 August.[147] It was attended by 300 people, but not all were satisfied customers. One blogger posted a scathing account of the organisers' relentless self-promotion, which had prompted an exasperated concert-goer to complain that the whole event was 'simply Russkii Obraz's latest PR action.'[148]

Russkii Obraz's frenetic activity during the summer of 2009 highlighted the declining position of Nashi and other pro-Kremlin youth organisations. In the aftermath of the regime's consolidation in the 2007–8 election cycle, these structures lost their original anti-Orangist function. At Nashi's annual camp at Lake Seliger in the summer of 2008, Vladislav Surkov had announced the end of the revolutionary threat and exhorted Nashi's commissars to support the new president's plans for economic modernisation. Instead of struggle with 'fascists' and Western pawns, their task was now technological innovation and scientific creativity.[149] The effect of this ideological demobilisation was to create opportunities for nationalists to pursue their own agendas within the protected framework of Kremlin-aligned structures. In October 2008, the ruling party's youth movement, Molodaya Gvardiya, launched a campaign called 'Our money to our people,' whose original protectionist message quickly degenerated into anti-immigrant racism. On 19 January 2009 – coincidentally the day of Markelov's murder – arriving passengers from Tashkent at Moscow's Kazan railway station were confronted by a crowd of Molodaya Gvardiya militants shouting, 'Illegals Out!'[150] The infiltration of Molodaya Gvardiya by ultranationalists was confirmed a month later by the posting on its website of an article denying the holocaust.[151]

More serious was the hijacking of Mestnye, the organisation of 'patriotic ecologists' backed by the government of Moscow region. Since 2006, Mestnye had been replicating the racist rhetoric and the format of the DPNI's anti-immigrant campaigns in order to co-opt nationalist youth. This mimicry undoubtedly facilitated Mestnye's engagement with nationalist subcultures. Both of Goryachev's principal 'curators' – Aleksei Mitryushin and Leonid Simunin – were functionaries of Mestnye. The adoption of nationalist causes also exposed Mestnye to a transformative influx of radical nationalists. These recruits included such notable figures in Goryachev's network as Sergei Nikulkin and Aleksei Baranovskii. Nikulkin, known in neo-Nazi circles as 'Sergei Sergeevich,' was a former leader of Tikhonov's skinhead gang OB-88 and an authoritative figure in neo-Nazi circles. Baranovskii, Russkii Verdikt's coordinator and an ardent advocate of revolutionary violence, was serving in the summer of 2009 as 'consultant on immigration' for Mestnye's public reception office.[152]

The neo-Nazi capture of Mestnye was evident at a meeting of its cadres on 20 August 2009. In a euphoric message to Tikhonov, Goryachev recalled Nikulkin's astonishment at arriving in a room full of neo-Nazi militants and football gang members. At the head of the table sat Goryachev and Baranovskii. Aleksei Mitryushin was there alongside five members of his football gang, Gallant Steeds. Leonid Simunin observed the proceedings 'as a kind of malicious curator – no one talks to him, and he talks to nobody.' This reflected a

fundamental transformation: the criminal elements who once dominated Mestnye had been supplanted, according to Goryachev, 'by extremists of various stripes.' The ensuing discussion 'proceeded in the spirit of extremism and intolerance, as if it were not Kremlin henchmen (kremlyad') but some kind of DPNI gang.' At Goryachev's prompting, the police were labelled 'nothing but a terrorist band, an accomplice of criminal immigrants.'[153]

Preparing for the Russian March

In the autumn of 2009, the leaders of Russkii Obraz were preparing for the greatest moment of their political careers. By organising the central legal event of that year's Russian march, they were confirming their ascendancy in radical nationalist politics. To achieve this feat, they undertook a delicate balancing act. By a series of statements and actions, they presented their radicalism in terms that were designed to send different messages to their curators and their constituency. The message to the Kremlin was that Russkii Obraz was trying to outflank Belov's DPNI and to subvert its plans for the Russian March. The message to the radical nationalist milieu was that Russkii Obraz was both the voice of Russian neo-Nazism and the spearhead of the struggle against immigrant 'occupiers.'

Central to Russkii Obraz's plans for the Russian march was an alliance with Soprotivlenie ('Resistance'), a St. Petersburg-based organisation headed by Roman Zentsov. A world champion at 'mixed fighting' (or 'fighting without rules'), Zentsov used sport to promote radical nationalism. His cooperation with Russkii Obraz began at the first Day of Rightist Political Prisoners, when he had hosted a training session for militants. For Russkii Obraz, Soprotivlenie was an ideal ally. On the one hand, Zentsov appeared to enjoy Kremlin favour. In April 2007, Vladimir Putin had observed Zentsov's fighting prowess at a tournament in St. Petersburg, which was rich in patriotic symbolism. Billed as 'Russia versus America,' the tournament featured a Russian side led by Zentsov and Fedor Emel'yanov. After crushing their opponents, Zentsov and his teammate were invited to tea with Putin at Konstantinovskii Palace.[154] Presidential approval was a kind of green light for the Kremlin-aligned media to build up Zentsov as a role model for young people and a crusader for healthy lifestyles. At the same time, pro-Kremlin youth organisations courted him as an exemplary patriot. In October 2009, a long interview with Zentsov appeared on the website of Molodaya Gvardiya, the youth wing of the ruling party. It contained his ruminations on 'the serious problem of degeneration' caused by the influx of alien values, the rise of consumerism, the decline of manhood and the proliferation of homosexuality.[155]

Official approval obscured the fact that Zentsov was both a genuine radical and the personification of a kind of combative nationalism. He had provided coaching in unarmed combat to neo-Nazi skinhead groups like Slavyanskii Soyuz.[156] He was also known to use training sessions as a forum for racist indoctrination.[157] His own rhetoric was contradictory. On the one hand, he criticised 'radical nationalism of the blood,' and argued that 'you can be Russian by blood, but in spirit and mentality you have already long been a central Asian, an inhabitant of "eastern" Russia.' On the other, he spoke in Darwinian terms about a 'war between

the races,' a war in which Russians risked becoming a 'weak herd' hunted by wolves.[158]

Forging a pact between Russkii Obraz and Soprotivlenie was not easy. There was a real gulf between the life experience of Goryachev's team of university-educated intellectuals and Zentsov's band of martial arts fighters. One sign of the tension between the two groups was a public statement by a leader of Soprotivlenie that was intended to quell rumours that the organisation had withdrawn from its joint project with Russkii Obraz.[159] Yet both sides understood the benefits of cooperation. Each possessed what the other lacked. Goryachev had a sophisticated media machine and links to the Presidential Administration. In return, Zentsov offered access to the martial arts subculture and the charisma of a muscular sporting champion. Evidently the authorities were not unaware of the risks of this convergence. In September 2009, Zentsov had warned Goryachev that the FSB feared a merger between Russkii Obraz and Soprotivlenie. Recounting these words to Tikhonov, Goryachev dismissed the claim as idle boasting. Tikhonov concurred: 'What is there to be afraid of? Twenty members of Soprotivenie and the politicians of RO?'[160] It was not unreasonable, however, for the security agencies to be concerned that the convergence of the two organisations might invigorate the far-right scene and trigger new outbreaks of far-right violence.

A second component of Russkii Obraz's preparations for the Russian march was the promulgation of a radically racist political programme. The purpose of this document was to signal to far-right militants that Russkii Obraz stood for more than opposition to illegal immigration. On the contrary, it advocated a fundamental reordering of the Russian state on racial lines. Elaborating an idea first articulated in Dmitrii Taratorin's May Day statement, the programme proclaimed that 'people are not equal, people are qualitatively different, and therefore they cannot have equal rights.' To institutionalise this inequality, it proposed a kind of apartheid. 'On territories of dense settlement, non-Slavic indigenous populations will have the right to construct their lives on basis of their national and religious traditions,' but outside this territory, 'they will be limited in civil rights.' Racial hierarchy was to be reinforced by a caste system that elevated warriors over civilians. Amongst Slavs, political rights were to be reserved for 'persons serving in the militia.' Women would be granted political rights only if they participated in public affairs or 'voluntarily served in the militia.' Mixed-race marriages were to be outlawed as 'a manifestation of a mindless attitude towards the fact of one's race.'[161]

The third component of Russkii Obraz's preparations for 4 November was the Ermolov Project, an effort to systematise the collection and dissemination of information about non-Slav minorities and their leftist sympathisers. Like Russkii Verdikt, the 'Ermolov Project' was an exercise in mimicry. It was overtly modelled on SOVA Center, the analytical centre whose monitoring of xenophobic extremism in Russia had become an obsession of Russkii Obraz's LiveJournal community blog.[162] Russkii Obraz proposed to subject its enemies, both non-European ethnic diasporas and Antifa militants, to a similar kind of spotlight. This project was named after Aleksei Ermolov, the Russian general responsible for the brutal pacification of the southern Caucasus in the aftermath of the

Napoleonic War.[163] Russkii Obraz promised to continue his work by using its regional network to collect information about the criminal activities, financial sources and local accomplices of the descendants of his adversaries. This information would be collated on a database, presented on an internet site, and analysed in regular reports.[164]

There is no doubt that the Ermolov Project enjoyed Kremlin support. As a structure designed to draw anti-immigrant militancy away from the 'Orangists' in Belov's DPNI, it served the goals of managed nationalism. Goryachev discussed the Ermolov Project not only with his curators but also with the overseer of managed nationalism, Nikita Ivanov. According to Goryachev, Pavel Karpov had insisted that the project be launched at a demonstration on 4 November, the day of the annual Russian march. It is also clear that substantial funding had been promised. The costs of the Bolotnaya Square concert were absorbed by Russkii Obraz because Ivanov had promised a steady flow of income to support the Ermolov Project.[165]

Another sign of official support was the readiness of Maksim Mishchenko to endorse the Ermolov Project. In an interview with a nationalist news agency, the Duma deputy expressed hope that 'this project will work in a constructive path.' For Mishchenko, the most important thing was loyalty to the regime: 'If the Ermolov Project will be directed against anti-state elements, which are destabilising the economic and political situation in the country, then that will be marvellous.' While he acknowledged the risk that the project might become 'radicalised' and he conceded that the invocation of the name of Ermolov 'sounds a little provocative,' Mishchenko showed little concern about the destabilising potential of a racially-motivated monitoring project supervised by neo-Nazis. Instead he hailed Russkii Obraz as a paragon of civic responsibility:

> I relate well to Russkii Obraz. In this organisation, there are many reasonable, fine people, who are ready for consistent and effective work. I have collaborated with them on a series of projects and I continue to cooperate.[166]

As a politician and an experienced purveyor of Kremlin propaganda, Mishchenko evidently believed that there was no risk in endorsing an organisation that had become the regime's main instrument for the subjugation of the far-right sector of the political arena.

Mishchenko's fulsome praise testified to the favourable impression that the 'reasonable, fine people' of Russkii Obraz had created in the corridors of power. Goryachev enjoyed the confidence of Kremlin functionaries like Nikita Ivanov and Pavel Karpov. His meticulously planned scenario for the Russian march demonstrated his ability to manipulate ultranationalist crowds. There was every reason to expect a turnout that would eclipse the DPNI's march in Lyublino and the consolidation of Russkii Obraz's position as a Kremlin's favourite proxy on the far-right. This development changed the nature of the relationship between Goryachev and his 'curators,' the unofficial Kremlin consultants who acted as intermediaries between him and the regime. On 28 October, Goryachev gleefully reported to Tikhonov that 'in ZOG [Zionist Occupation Government] there is an

interesting collision': his two main contacts – Mitryushin and Simyunin – were engaged in a kind of competition for the role of Russkii Obraz's main curator.[167]

The Bolotnaya Concert

The climax of Russkii Obraz's collaboration with the Kremlin was its concert in Moscow's Bolotnaya Square on 4 November 2009, the Day of National Unity. Although that day's Russian March had been authorised, it was consigned to the desolate, working class suburb of Lyublino. Russkii Obraz's concert took place in the heart of Moscow, a short walk from the Kremlin and major museums. Unlike in 2008, the crowd did not march along the Shevchenko embankment, which was reserved for a Nashi procession. What made Russkii Obraz's concert a sensation was the fact that it featured not only the organisation's own ensemble, Khuk Sprava, but also Kolovrat, a neo-Nazi band notorious for its inflammatory, white supremacist lyrics. Never before had Kolovrat performed as a band in a public space in Moscow.[168] Introducing the performers, Aleksei Vasil'ev of Russkii Verdikt declared that 'until the last moment, I didn't believe that here today, at a cannon-shot's distance from the Kremlin, several thousand rightist young people would gather to hear genuine rightist music.'[169] No less astounded was Dmitrii Bobrov, a neo-Nazi skinhead leader who had recently been released from prison. The concert, declared Bobrov, was 'unprecedented in the modern political history of Russia.' The fact that it was officially authorised was evidence that 'even in the depths of the regime, an awareness of the necessity of reform in a national spirit was taking shape.'[170]

In fact, the Kremlin's acquiescence owed less to ideological sympathy than to a determination to weaken its opponents. As in 2008, Russkii Obraz's event was intended to draw militants away from the Russian March led by anti-Kremlin radical nationalists like Aleksandr Belov and Dmitrii Demushkin. What transpired on 4 November 2009, however, was significantly more radical than the tame march a year earlier. On the one hand, Russkii Obraz was collaborating not with the loyalist politicians of Baburin's Narodnyi Soyuz but with the martial arts fighters of Zentsov's Soprotivlenie. On the other, the event revolved around a concert by Kolovrat, a symbol of neo-Nazi militancy.

Despite the storm of controversy that erupted around the Bolotnaya concert, we know very little about the negotiations between Russkii Obraz and the Kremlin that made it possible. According to Goryachev's court testimony, the original plan was for a rally, but he persuaded Aleksei Mitryushin and Pavel Karpov that a concert was preferable.[171] In a message to Tikhonov on 9 October, Goryachev announced that in eleven days, 'I am going with the complete scenario to Nikita Ivanov – both to become acquainted and to reach agreement.'[172] Apparently Ivanov approved of Goryachev's scenario. What is unclear is whether he grasped its implications. In the aftermath of the concert, an anonymous Kremlin source told *The New Times* that the authorities had not understood what Kolovrat represented and 'now there is a kind of embarrassment about what happened.'[173]

Goryachev may also have misled his curators. According to the same Kremlin source, the authorisation of the Bolotnaya concert was motivated by a desire to

'to draw part of the nationalists away from the Russian March in Lyublino.'[174] This effort failed because Goryachev rejected Karpov's demand that the two events coincide.[175] As a result, militants could attend both events. The newspaper *Vremya Novostei* reported that 'after the peaceful end of the proceedings at Lyublino, the majority of those assembled went to the centre of town to Bolotnaya Square.'[176]

Photograph 3 The crowd in Bolotnaya Square, 4 November 2009 (credit: Roustem Adagamov)

Photograph 4 Khuk Sprava performing in Bolotnaya Square (credit: Roustem Adagamov)

There is no doubt that Russkii Obraz went to great lengths to mitigate the embarrassment of its patrons. After passing through police metal detectors, concert goers were warned against shouting fascist slogans by 'tough young men' wearing identification as 'organisers.'[177] Denis Gerasimov, the lead singer of Kolovrat, reinforced the message before his first song. In a short speech, he exhorted his audience 'to demonstrate a maximum of cautious conduct, which matches, let us say, the current situation and the level of monitoring to which our meeting today is being subjected.'[178] The lyrics of his songs were also toned down. One of the band's most inflammatory pieces, 'Music of the Streets,' was a clear incitement to genocidal violence:

> We are ready for a ruthless battle
> For the people and the country
> All the scum will be destroyed by the holy war.[179]

In Bolotnaya Square, this became a meaningless patriotic platitude:

> We are ready to stand up
> For the people and the country,
> This is our struggle.[180]

One commentator observed sardonically that Gerasimov had excelled himself with 'a whole hour of songs without direct appeals for violence' or celebration of 'Slavs who fought in the SS for the purity of the Aryan race.'[181]

Despite these concessions, the concert was a triumph for Russkii Obraz. One of the organisation's sources was Kolovrat's fan group in the early 2000s, when the band existed at the edges of legality and was forced to perform at closed concerts that were often broken up by police. Now Kolovrat, the cultural incarnation of Russian neo-Nazism, had performed before a crowd of thousands of skinheads at a legal concert in central Moscow, 'a cannon-shot's distance from the Kremlin.'[182] The next morning, Russkii Obraz's press-spokesman, Evgenii Valyaev, posted a self-congratulatory report on his blog. Boasting that the concert had been staged 'for our own kind,' he gloated that the 'all-human Russian-federation-citizen [*obshchechelovek-rossiyanin*, code for a racial outsider] is very uncomfortable at such events.'[183]

This euphoria was short-lived. The preparations for the concert had coincided with the final stages of the hunt for the killers of Markelov and Baburova. In October, the FSB had tracked Nikita Tikhonov to his apartment and installed listening devices. In an attempt to elicit an incriminating admission, the chief investigator, Igor' Krasnov, secured the cooperation of Mikhail Markelov, the brother of the murdered lawyer, who told the newspaper *Vzglyad* on 27 October that the names of the killers were known to him and that they were connected to 'a public organisation, which works closely with representatives of Western countries.'[184] This cryptic statement might have been understood as a reference to Russkii Obraz, which was assiduously developing ties with Western ultranationalists. Alarmed by the news, Tikhonov and Khasis had a tense discussion about

whether he might be a suspect. 'I think,' reflected Tikhonov, 'that they will suspect me.'[185] Khasis concurred: 'They have identified us.' This, she insisted, could only be a result of betrayal: 'someone has informed on us.'[186]

The investigation did not only incriminate Tikhonov and Khasis. It also implicated Russkii Obraz. On 3 November, Lieutenant-General M.V. Belousov, the director of the FSB's Department for the Defence of Constitutional Order, reported to his superiors about the results of the surveillance operation. He noted that Tikhonov and Khasis 'maintain regular contacts with members of the informal association of nationalist tendency, Russkii Obraz, in particular with its leader Goryachev.' According to the report, Goryachev was an accomplice of Tikhonov and Khasis, whom he had provided with both material and ideological support. Noting that the group was planning new attacks and that there was a risk that Tikhonov and Khasis would escape to Ukraine, Belousov recommended the immediate arrest not only of Tikhonov and Khasis, but also of Goryachev and a fourth figure known only by the alias 'Monya.'[187]

On the eve of the Russian march, on the night of 3–4 November, the FSB arrested Tikhonov and Khasis and stormed their apartment.[188] The investigators discovered a small arsenal, including hand grenades, explosives, automatic weapons, and the antique Browning pistol that had been used to kill Stanislav Markelov and Anastasia Baburova. They also found numerous accessories of a clandestine life: fake passports with Tikhonov's photograph, wigs, and a fake moustache, and beard.[189] No less incriminating were the contents of Khasis's handbag: a memory stick containing images of a beheaded Tajik immigrant and an array of BORN declarations. The latter included the announcement of the murder of a St. Petersburg police investigator, Georgii Boiko, which was planned but never committed.[190]

Under interrogation, Tikhonov confessed to have killed Markelov 'out of personal enmity' provoked by the lawyer's 'defence of Chechen terrorists' and his 'involvement in the criminal prosecution of my acquaintances.' Tikhonov claimed that he had not originally planned to kill Baburova, but feared that she might recognise him because they had already crossed paths during his surveillance of Markelov. When Tikhonov was brought in handcuffs to the scene of Markelov and Baburova's murder on Prechistenka street, he calmly recounted how he had committed it, demonstrating how he raised the gun at each of his victims as he fired the fatal shots.[191] Particularly incriminating was the admission that he had used the Browning pistol, a fact which was yet to be established by ballistics testing.[192] What was omitted in Tikhonov's account was any mention of his accomplices. He claimed to have acted entirely alone.

Conclusion

The concert in Bolotnaya Square marked the high-water mark of managed nationalism. In order to exert control over ultranationalist subcultures, the Presidential Administration permitted Russia's most notorious neo-Nazi band to perform for thousands of skinheads in central Moscow, a short walk from

the Kremlin. The significance of this concession was magnified by the growing curbs on freedom of assembly in Russia. During 2009, riot police had repeatedly dispersed peaceful crowds of liberal and leftist opposition demonstrators. In the summer, Eduard Limonov, the National Bolshevik leader, had focused attention on the closure of public space by launching 'Strategy-31,' a series of demonstrations, held on the 31st day of every relevant month, in defence of Article 31 of the Russian Federation constitution, which enshrined the right to freedom of assembly.[193] Oborona, a pro-democracy youth organisation, took a similar tack by staging flash mob protests in metro carriages on 21 September. A statement justifying the action explained that '[u]nder conditions where the regime had de facto deprived citizens of their constitutional rights to freedom of speech and assembly, actions in the metro are virtually the only way of establishing direct contact with people.'[194]

The fact that Russkii Obraz was exempted from these restrictions testifies to the special role that representatives of far-right subcultures had begun to play in the Kremlin's manipulation of the political arena. The leaders of Russkii Obraz made no secret of their political views in their dealings with functionaries of the Presidential Administration. In September 2008, after a series of meetings with Pavel Karpov, Goryachev reflected in an email about the candour of his dialogue with a nihilistic regime:

> Our contacts with officialdom take place without mimicry – they know that we are Nazis and this suits them. This is the main characteristic of our ZOG [Zionist Occupation Government] – it is a vacuum, it is absolutely unprincipled – there are simply chips in its hands, and those in the hands of others. Those in the hands of others, it wipes out. And it tries to arrange those in its own hands in the way that is most harmonious or beneficial to itself.[195]

Russkii Obraz was one of the chips in the Kremlin's hand. For the supervisors of 'managed nationalism,' Russkii Obraz was above all a potential counter-revolutionary force, capable of redirecting crowds of aggressive men away from the 'Orangists' and into loyalist ranks. This illusion was reinforced by Russkii Obraz's readiness to make common cause with the authorities in its struggle against its liberal and Antifa adversaries.

The arrest of Tikhonov and Khasis on the eve of Russkii Obraz's concert in Bolotnaya Square may have been a coincidence, but it cast a bright spotlight on the murky processes of managed nationalism. In news reports, the two events became part of a single story that connected the Kremlin's manipulation of the political arena to the murder of Stanislav Marchenko and Anastasia Baburova. This linkage sparked a major public controversy, which was fanned during 2010 by new killings, by Antifa militancy, by investigative journalism, by leaks from the security apparatus, and by the rising opposition to the regime. The effect was to discredit Russkii Obraz and expose its curators and allies in Kremlin-aligned structures. Ultimately the crisis of 'managed nationalism' became part of a larger political upheaval.

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6 The crackdown

> We cooperated with [Russkii Obraz] on the Serbian question, travelled there together, but this was only a tactical cooperation, I didn't delve into their ideology, and any Nazi is repulsive to me.
>
> – Maksim Mishchenko, United Russia deputy in the State Duma and leader of Rossiya Molodaya[1]

> I do not understand what you achieved by these murders. Did you hope to come to power in this way? It is my deep conviction that behind the [defendants' box] glass sits absolute evil. Evil must be punished.
>
> – Prosecutor Boris Loktionov, final summation in the trial of Tikhonov and Khasis, 28 April 2011[2]

Like Markelov's murder, the arrest of his alleged killers became a political event. On 5 November, President Medvedev received the FSB chairman, Aleksandr Bortnikov, for a public report about the case. To underline the importance of the occasion, a colleague of Anastasia Baburova from *Novaya Gazeta* was invited to the Kremlin to witness the exchange. Bortnikov announced that the crime of Markelov's murder had been 'solved.' Not only had his officers secured a confession from the killer, but they had 'confiscated a large quantity of firearms,' exposed another hate crime committed in September, and 'uncovered the intention of this gang to commit another murder, which could have resonance.'[3] Emphasising the seriousness of these crimes, Medvedev vowed that the crackdown on the militants by the FSB and other security agencies would continue.[4]

Although Medvedev made no reference to Tikhonov and Khasis's links to a Kremlin-aligned organisation, it was clear that the future of managed nationalism was at stake. The security forces were in the process of demonstrating a chain of connections stretching from the upper echelons of the Presidential Administration to a neo-Nazi death squad. At best, this could serve as kompromat, compromising information that might be concealed at a price. At worst, it threatened to become a scandal discrediting and even incriminating high-ranking officials.

The political impact of the Tikhonov–Khasis case was magnified by the antifa movement and sympathetic journalists. Antifa militants used flash mobs, demonstrations, and the blogosphere to draw attention to the unsavoury relationship

between the authorities and neo-Nazis. At the same time, the liberal media, often relying on leaks from security agencies, published a series of exposes about Russkii Obraz and the 'curators' who acted as intermediaries with the authorities.

Caught between the security organs and its liberal and antifa adversaries, Russkii Obraz had little room for manoeuvre. At first, it seemed that the organisation might survive by a combination of denial, misdirection, and official connivance. In the short term, its radical image was burnished by its apparent connection to Tikhonov and from the impression that it enjoyed institutional clout. In a bid to placate the Kremlin, Goryachev reoriented Russkii Obraz's activism towards charity and reaffirmed his hostility to the extra-systemic opposition. What derailed this effort was the progress of the investigation, which quickly secured damning testimony from Goryachev himself about his links to Tikhonov and the identities of some of his Kremlin curators. When these transcripts were leaked in early 2011, Goryachev and his comrades became pariahs in the eyes both of the regime and of the radical nationalist milieu. Russkii Obraz had entered a downward spiral from which it would never recover.

Denial

One day after Medvedev's meeting with Bortnikov, Senior Investigator Igor' Krasnov made his first move against the Kremlin's far-right proxies. FSB agents searched the apartment of Il'ya Goryachev. By Goryachev's own admission, his resistance was broken by what they discovered. During an eight-hour interrogation three days later, he was presented with 'all kinds of personal information' that had been downloaded from the hard drive of his laptop computer. 'There was no hellish *kompromat*,' he later confessed to a journalist, 'but for everyone there is a key.'[5] The pressure was increased by the fact that he was initially classified not as a witness but as an accomplice of Tikhonov.[6] Given a choice between arrest and cooperation, he chose the latter. He provided incriminating testimony about Tikhonov and Khasis, claiming that both had separately boasted to him about their role in Markelov's murder. He also provided a motive. According to Goryachev, Tikhonov resented Markelov's unrelenting pursuit of Ryukhin's murderers, which had forced Tikhonov into hiding.[7]

Even as he disclosed their private conversations, Goryachev tried to distance himself from Tikhonov and Khasis by fabricating a pattern of confrontation between himself and the two prisoners. According to Goryachev, they had criticised his own lawful activism and had implicitly threatened him when they boasted of murdering Markelov. In Goryachev's testimony, Russkii Obraz became the very antithesis of Tikhonov's radicalism. 'In public-political life, we speak out against terror, against violence,' Goryachev reassured his interrogators. 'These are dead end methods, they cannot lead any political organisation to success.'[8] He said nothing about the movement's record as an apologist for neo-Nazi violence and its vigorous campaigns in support of imprisoned neo-Nazi 'partisans.' Nor did he explain why a politician opposed to terrorism should have maintained contact with an outlaw like Tikhonov.

Russkii Obraz's reaction to the arrest of Tikhonov and Khasis was characteristically ambiguous. In their public utterances, its leaders hurried to dissociate themselves from the accused. Evgenii Valyaev, the movement's press spokesperson, issued a statement that 'neither Khasis nor Tikhonov are or were members of the Russkii Obraz public movement.'[9] He ignored the fact that Tikhonov was a founder of the movement's original journal, and that Khasis had become an active participant in its internal life.[10] Even more forgetful was Il'ya Goryachev, who claimed to be unable to recall Tikhonov, his close friend and former co-editor, amongst the numerous contributors to his journal.[11]

This public amnesia coincided with signals to the neo-Nazi milieu from key figures in Russkii Obraz's community expressing support for the prisoners. Within days of the arrests, Aleksei Baranovskii's LiveJournal blog ('Soberminded') hailed Tikhonov as a paragon of heroism, a warrior who 'felt personal responsibility for the Russian movement and the fate of our nation' and who 'did what had to be done, what he considered right.' For 'Soberminded,' Tikhonov's trajectory had lessons for aspiring insurgents:

> To kill and leave is not difficult. What is complicated is psychologically to transgress a boundary. Not everyone is capable of this. But if you decide that this is your path – no one will stop you… the greatness of [Tikhonov's] life path lies not only in what he did but in the fact that he showed an alternative to the apparent dead end faced by the Russian resistance – prison or death. There is a third path – the path of an illegal.[12]

As an illegal, Tikhonov was not a hitman, but a patriot who 'worked for an idea' and who 'knew how to live RIGHTly [*PRAVil'no*].' Lamenting that this righteous hero had somewhere miscalculated, 'Soberminded' concluded that 'he sacrificed himself… for the sake of our victory.'[13] This panegyric to a killer was quickly deleted, and Baranovskii denied that he was 'Soberminded.'[14]

Soon after the appearance of this vindication of neo-Nazi terror on his blog, Baranovskii launched a public campaign to promote the idea that his imprisoned friends were innocent. In his capacity as co-ordinator of Russkii Verdikt, Russkii Obraz's subsidiary 'rights-defence' organisation, Baranovskii became a ubiquitous commentator in media coverage of the case. In series of press-releases and interviews, he portrayed Khasis, his colleague at Russkii Verdikt, as an idealistic volunteer and rights-defender who monitored 'illegal arrests and other oppression of the Russian majority in all of Russia.' Her arrest could only be the result of 'a terrible misunderstanding.'[15] At the same time, Baranovskii accused the security forces of mistreating the prisoners. He insinuated that the heads of Tikhonov and Khasis had been covered in bags at their first court appearance to conceal the traces of torture or injections of truth serum that had left them in a state of narcotic intoxication.[16] Russkii Verdikt also arranged material support for the prisoners. It set up an account for donations and arranged regular deliveries of food parcels.[17] After a fortnight of protest, the authorities granted Khasis's request to replace her court-appointed lawyer with Aleksandr Vasil'ev, Russkii Verdikt's

in-house lawyer, who had made his reputation as a defender of neo-Nazis like Maksim Martsinkevich ('Tesak').[18]

The credibility of Russkii Verdikt's campaign was bolstered by more moderate nationalist activists. On 13 November, ten activists of Russkoe Obshchestvennoe Dvizhenie (Russian Public Movement, ROD) gathered outside the offices of the federal Ombudsman, Vladimir Lukin, to demonstrate against the 'bagging' of the heads of Tikhonov and Khasis during their court appearance. The picket was led by Natal'ya Kholmogorova, who was surprised when Lukin came out to hear their demands and invite them inside for a discussion of the case. At Lukin's request, Kholmogorova produced a statement of ROD's concerns about procedural violations, which Lukin's office passed on to the Investigative Committee and the Prosecutor's Office with a demand for an urgent explanation.[19]

This agitation did nothing to halt the inexorable progress of the investigation. It was not long before other prominent members of Russkii Obraz's inner circle were summoned for interrogation. On 17 November, it was the turn of Dmitrii Steshin, the war correspondent at *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*.[20] During his seven hours of questioning at the Interior Ministry, Steshin hinted at Tikhonov's guilt by observing that he was a Russian nationalist and 'he seemed to avoid discussion of the murders' of Markelov and Baburova.[21] Police then searched Steshin's apartment. In a bid to dispel adverse publicity about his 'arrest,' Steshin tried to play down the incident. 'Everything had been peaceful,' he noted. 'There was no arm or leg twisting, they even treated me to cranberry pastry.'[22] A week later, it was the turn of Aleksei Baranovskii, the coordinator of Russkii Verdikt.[23]

At first, the media paid little attention to the connection between Russkii Obraz and Tikhonov. On 9 November, six days after Tikhonov's arrest, *New Times* published a long article by Evgenii Levkovich on 'managed nationalism' and the scandal that had erupted over Russkii Obraz's concert in Bolotnaya Square. Russkii Obraz, he claimed, 'is supervised by the United Russia deputy and leader of Rossiya Molodaya, Maksim Mishchenko, who in turn is supervised by Vladislav Surkov.'[24] But Levkovich made no mention of Russkii Obraz's link to the murderers of Markelov and Baburova. A week later, as the security forces expanded their crackdown on the radical nationalist milieu, *New Times* returned to the subject of Russkii Obraz's relationship with the regime. According to a 'source close to the presidential administration,' the Kremlin 'had placed a bet on Russkii Obraz a year ago.' Vladislav Surkov had been impressed by the erudite and witty articles in the movement's journal. He had also been encouraged by the fact that it was self-published: Russkii Obraz was not beholden to any other power structure. By taking Russkii Obraz under his wing, Surkov acquired an instrument for exerting control over ultranationalist youth. The author made no effort, however, to explore the implications of Tikhonov's arrest for this project. Instead he cited Goryachev's mendacious assurance that he had lost contact with Tikhonov three years ago.[25]

What put an end to this caution was the reaction to BORN's next murder. On 16 November, Aleksei Korshunov, Tikhonov's successor as the group's leader, shot dead the antifa militant Ivan Khutorskoi ('Kostolom') in the stairwell of his apartment block.[26] The murder sent shockwaves through Russia's antifa milieu.

A unifying and authoritative figure, who was respected by different factions, Khutorskoi was renowned as a street fighter, as an activist, and an organiser.[27] He had made his reputation in skirmishes with neo-Nazis, and founded the Russian version of RASH (Red and Anarchist Skinheads), an anti-fascist skinhead movement. To the surprise of many, he passed a law degree and made a career as an lawyer for 'Children of the Streets,' a charitable organisation providing assistance to homeless adolescents.[28] One tribute to his importance was his prominence on death lists compiled by neo-Nazis. Another was the series of attempts on his life. BORN's press release treated his assassination as a triumph. Gloating about the 'liquidation' of this 'fighter who had organised and personally participated in numerous violent actions against activists of the Russian national movement,' BORN vowed that 'actions of vengeance' would continue: 'Street antifa-hooligans, immigrant ruffians, Russophobic journalists, executioners in epaulettes and [judicial] robes – all the enemies of the Russian movement and the Russian nation will receive the punishment that they deserve.'[29]

It was widely expected that Khutorskoi's murder would trigger a new 'stairwell war' between antifa and neo-Nazis. Instead, it provoked an attack by antifa militants against a symbol of 'managed nationalism.' Their target was Rossiya Molodaya (RuMol), the pro-Kremlin youth organisation that had been publicly cooperating with Russkii Obraz since the summer of 2008. On the evening of 16 November 2009, 70 antifa militants raided RuMol's office, pelting it with rocks and bottles. Inside was Maksim Mishchenko, the Duma deputy and leader of RuMol, who had been named by *New Times* on 9 November as the official who 'supervised' Russkii Obraz.[30] At first, Mishchenko seemed to encourage this impression. Four days after Tikhonov's arrest, he had publicly endorsed Russkii Obraz's 'Ermolov Project' as a useful tool for dealing with the threat posed by ethnic diasporas. 'I get along well with Russkii Obraz,' he boasted. 'In this organisation, there are many responsible, normal people, who are prepared for consistent and effective work. I have collaborated with them, and I am collaborating with them.'[31] This candour clearly inflamed the anger of the antifa militants who besieged his headquarters. One of the avengers, who had been detained by RuMol activists, later told police that the action was 'an attack on ideological enemies, who support Nazis.'[32]

Caught in the media spotlight as an accomplice of neo-Nazis, Mishchenko was forced to disown his 'responsible, normal' allies. To distract the media from his involvement in Russkii Obraz's racially-charged campaign against non-Slavic immigration, he conceded that 'we cooperated with [Russkii Obraz] on the Serbian question, travelled there together, but this was only a tactical cooperation, I didn't delve into their ideology, and any Nazi is repulsive to me.' He also lashed out at the 'Orangist mass media' for insinuating that 'I am almost the handler of this Russkii Obraz, and its headquarters are located in our headquarters.'[33] Mishchenko sued Levkovich and *New Times*'s editor Evgeniya Al'bats. At a hearing in July 2010, each were ordered by a judge to pay him token damages of 50 rubles.[34] Despite this victory, Mishchenko's once promising career had suffered a serious blow. Unlike Nashi's Robert Shlegel,' another pro-Kremlin youth functionary elected to the Duma in 2007, Mishchenko was not nominated for

re-election on the lists of Edinaya Rossiya in the 2011 elections. Instead he was consigned to a less prestigious post in the Public Chamber.[35]

Three weeks after the raid on RuMol, antifa activists struck at another institutional bastion of ultra-nationalism. This time the target was the newspaper *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, which had offered a platform to Tikhonov and Khasis's defenders.[36] It had also angered the antifa milieu by likening Khutorskoi's funeral to that of gangster bosses in the 1990s.[37] According to the antifa blogger 'Maskodagama' (the journalist Aleksandr Chernykh), the reason for this cruel analogy was obvious. Dmitrii Steshin, 'a close friend of an array of Nazis' like Goryachev and Tikhonov, wrote for *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, and 'his cannibalistic views could not but influence' the newspaper's line. Less visible, but no less symptomatic, was the employment of Andrei Gulyutin ('Most'), another Russkii Obraz insider and 'drummer in the Hitlerite group *Bandy Moskvy*,' who wrote for *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* under a pseudonym. According to Maskodagama, the result was an 'openly pro-Kremlin' publication that was comparable to the infamous Nazi tabloid *Der Sturmer*.[38] To draw attention to the newspaper's links to neo-Nazism, a group of masked militants approached the entrance to the newspaper's editorial offices at around 8 pm on 10 December. They smashed the glass doors with bricks, hurled smoke bombs into the foyer, scattered leaflets, and dispersed into the night. This time, none of attackers were arrested, but there was little doubt about their political identity or their motives. The leaflets left at the scene accused the newspaper of disseminating lies about immigration and the antifa movement. Steshin was singled out as an inciter of racial hatred and a collaborator of neo-Nazis.[39]

In the aftermath of the raids, the media began to draw attention to Russkii Obraz as evidence that 'managed nationalism' had spiralled out of control. On 25 November Aleksandr Litoi argued in *Novaya Gazeta* that the Kremlin may have intended 'to extend "managed democracy" to this ultranationalist political segment,' but in practice this project had become a screen for the formation of violent, militarised formations, which were targeting not merely their antifa adversaries but also the state itself.[40] Three days later Yuliya Latynina, another *Novaya Gazeta* journalist, contended on her weekly radio programme that the regime had created a monster. 'Managed nationalism,' she suggested, had become *Azefshchina*, a reference to Evno Azef, the tsarist double-agent who became leader of the SR fighting organisation and then supervised the assassination of his employer, Interior Minister Vyacheslav Plehve. As in the 1900s, the state's efforts to control extreme elements had helped to sustain a violent paramilitary underground. 'I don't know,' she reflected, 'how the authorities will get control of this monster, which they themselves nurtured and, judging by everything, financed.'[41]

Russkii Obraz defiant

Russkii Obraz showed few signs that it was intimidated by the unfolding crackdown. Instead, it reaffirmed its ties to the neo-Nazi underground. On 6 December 2009, Russkii Obraz activists participated in a 'fighting without rules' tournament

hosted in St. Petersburg by Roman Zentsov's Soprotivlenie. The event took place in a sporting hall owned by the Ministry for Emergency Situations. The participants included Dmitrii Bobrov, the notorious leader of the St. Petersburg skinhead gang Shults-88, who had recently been released from prison.[42] Four days later, at Bobrov's instigation, the Petersburg branch of Russkii Verdikt celebrated International Human Rights Day on Nevskii Prospekt, where they distributed 2,000 leaflets criticising the torture of 'rightist' prisoners by the security forces.[43]

This propaganda campaign intensified on 29 December, when Tikhonov and Khasis returned to Basmannyi Court for a hearing on the prolongation of their pre-trial detention. Russkii Obraz had prepared for the occasion with a picket outside the court building in Lermontov Square. Standing beneath a statue of the poet, about fifteen activists, some masked, held a banner emblazoned with the slogan, 'Prisoners of conscience, You are not forgotten.'[44] Although the court session was closed to the public, it became a media event. While the judge deliberated before handing down his ruling, Tikhonov was led into a foyer, where a throng of journalists was milling. He used the opportunity to recant his confession, claiming that he had been coerced by threats to place Khasis in a punishment cell with male criminals. Exploiting the public furore over the death of the whistle-blower Sergei Magnitskii in custody two weeks earlier, Tikhonov insinuated that he was also a victim of police corruption. According to him, the protocol of the search of his apartment included 'a whole heap of unknown weapons' but omitted 17,000 Euros that he claimed belonged to Khasis. Asked if he had links to neo-Nazi or extreme right-wing groups, he affected innocent outrage: 'Look at me: do I resemble a skinhead? Or a blond beast? Evidently they were incapable of finding better candidates for the role of nationalists than us.'[45]

Tikhonov's protestations of innocence were difficult to reconcile with the belligerent tone of the New Year messages from the prisoners, which were posted several days later on Russkii Obraz's website and widely disseminated in the ultranationalist blogosphere. Both thanked those who had supported them in adversity by public actions or private expressions of solidarity. Khasis singled out the efforts of Dmitrii Bobrov, the recently released neo-Nazi skinhead, whom she praised as 'an example of an unbroken spirit.' She wished 'success' to all of her well-wishers, explaining that as a pagan, 'success is a gift from our Gods to the worthy.' The meaning of success was spelled out in Tikhonov's statement. Boasting that he was in a festive mood, he exhorted his comrades to fight until victory:

> For those who are taken prisoner, it is very important to understand that they are not forgotten, not abandoned in adversity. Russians do not abandon their own in war, and in my case this is very clear. Only mutual assistance and a readiness for self-sacrifice will lead us to victory in the struggle for our people, so that our former country will again become ours. Not for one minute did I doubt the rightness of the path that I once chose. What difference does the future make, if we are all waiting for victory, our victory! Comrades, do not lose faith in victory, and do everything for its coming! Faith in Our Victory gives me strength and strengthens the spirit in the most difficult moments. I have not lost it for an instant.[46]

Tikhonov was torn between two roles. In court two days earlier, he had played the innocent victim of police corruption, who had confessed to absurd crimes to protect his girlfriend. Now, he was striking a pose as a titan of the skinhead underground, a 'prisoner-of-war' who needed to reassure his comrades of his unswerving faith in 'the rightness of the path that I once chose,' an unmistakeable reference to armed struggle.

Tikhonov's mixed messages were echoed by his comrades at liberty. Il'ya Goryachev marked the New Year with a triumphant declaration about Russkii Obraz's emergence as a political force in its own right. Boasting that the organisation now possessed twenty branches and close to a thousand members, he declared that it was no longer an object of manipulation but 'a subject on the political field.' This changed the nature of its relationship with the regime, which was now 'forced to listen to and negotiate with us.' Goryachev also hinted at the existence of highly-placed 'friends,' who had thwarted an attempt by left-liberal 'agents of influence' in the security apparatus to destroy Russkii Obraz. From this position of strength, Goryachev elaborated a programme that would lead to 'our victory.' To an uninformed reader, he was proposing a version of the neo-Gramscian 'metapolitical' strategy that had been popularised by the European *nouvelle droite* and its Russian disciples like Aleksandr Dugin: the achievement of cultural hegemony by educational and cultural activism to promote non-democratic values.[47] 'We live in a post-industrial information society,' explained Goryachev, 'and the real levers of power belong to those who form public opinion.' In accordance with Russkii Obraz's goal of becoming a 'powerful lobby group in the media,' it would need to infiltrate 'every popular publication, every [television] channel, internet portal, and radio station.'[48]

Behind this essentially peaceful quest for hearts and minds lurked a more sinister agenda. Although he made no mention of Tikhonov and Khasis, Goryachev signalled his support for paramilitary violence in two ways. First, he invoked his habitual analogy, the struggle of the IRA against the British state, as evidence that 'police repression of any opposition has only strengthened it and created a new generation of political soldiers.' In Russkii Obraz's discourse, 'political soldier,' a term coined by the Belgian neo-Nazi ideologue Jean-Francois Thiriart, was code for paramilitary fighter. Second, Goryachev proposed a disturbing model for Russkii Obraz:

> The new century will be an era not of states but of corporations, diasporas, and mega-bands – cohesive groups of people, asserting their interests and their place in the new global world. Our ideal is the spiritual-knightly Orders of the Middle Ages. Now a new, technocratic Middle Age is beginning, and RO must become a similar, contemporary order, a diversified network of cells across the whole world.[49]

To the uninformed reader, Goryachev's enthusiasm for a 'spiritual-knightly order' may have seemed like a pretentious metaphor or fanciful antiquarianism. To the inner circle of Russkii Obraz, however, Goryachev's words sent a different, more

sinister signal. In October 2009, they had heard a lecture by Vol'fgang Akunov on the role of such 'knightly orders' in the history of Nazism; they had also adopted the death's head skull and the motto of the SS.[50] They would have known that the notion of a 'knightly order' had inspired Heinrich Himmler as a model for the SS, the organisation that implemented the holocaust.[51]

The same combination of hubris and neo-Nazi allusions pervaded Goryachev's next public relations manoeuvre, an interview with the liberal newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*. In a series of detailed responses to questions posed by a pseudonymous reporter, he boasted that Russkii Obraz would shape Russia's development by attaining both political power and cultural hegemony. But he was careful to emphasise Russkii Obraz's loyalty to the Kremlin and its hostility to the left-liberal opposition:

> The main direction is a struggle for power. But this struggle for power is being waged not against the Kremlin, but with ideological opponents at our niche, with left-liberals. This is a different generation of people. A generation of 20-year-olds does not struggle with a generation of 50-year-olds. The struggle is for a future regime within the limits of a single generation.[52]

To emphasise what was at stake in this generational struggle, Goryachev contended that Russia stood at a turning point comparable to European student uprisings of 1968, which 'set a vector for the development of Europe' that 'changed [its] face beyond recognition.' The legacy of this upheaval was a continent 'which is completely under the control of anti-national regimes of liberals.'[53] The aim of Russkii Obraz was to appropriate the New Left's political technology to achieve the opposite result:

> Our task is to repeat the path followed by European leftists in 1968, when they were young student leaders. They were able to become the political class that today controls Europe. If they could do this, so can we. And the left-liberal camp, antifa, are our main rival. We have the same goal – gradually to reach the levers of power. To become power.[54]

Were Russkii Obraz to lose this struggle, the consequences would be catastrophic. Russia would fall under the yoke either of an Islamic Caliphate or, worst of all, 'a liberal-totalitarian' regime. Elaborating a dystopian fantasy, Goryachev explained that 'liberal-totalitarianism' was 'the most harsh, dogmatic and cruel dictatorship that ever existed in human history,' because it aspired to transform humanity into a 'grey mass of uniform consumers.' Those who resisted 'would be implanted with microchips and sterilised for the common good.'[55]

For Russkii Obraz, Goryachev's conceptualisation of a 'struggle within a generation' acquired programmatic status.[56] But in light of BORN's terror campaign against antifa leaders like Ivan Khutorskoi and anti-fascist public figures like Stanislav Markelov, it had sinister implications. Nikita Tikhonov would later testify that Goryachev regarded Markelov as one of the most promising figures 'in

the camp of the enemy' and constantly demanded his liquidation.[57] BORN had become an instrument for the elimination of the leaders of a rival future and for the deliverance of Russia from the 'liberal-totalitarian' menace.

Another hint of Goryachev's attitude towards terror was his effort to downplay the significance of neo-Nazi violence. First, he relativised it by portraying it as the counterpart of antifa violence, which was actually far less lethal. Second, he attributed the rise of the neo-Nazi underground not to its revolutionary ideology but to 'circumstances.' The lack of political alternatives, he contended, had 'pushed many honest, sincere Russian people into the underground.' Reverting to his Irish fixation, he claimed that the violence in Ulster intensified after IRA fighters were denied the status of political prisoners. In Russia, the 'point of return has not yet been passed, and violence might be stopped by political methods. But time is already really short.'[58] The message to the authorities was that a neo-Nazi insurgency could be averted by granting concessions to Russkii Obraz. In the short term, this radicalism boosted Russkii Obraz's position in far-right circles. But it also ensured that he remained a primary suspect for the security organs as the hunt for Tikhonov's accomplices proceeded. What lent urgency to that hunt was the continuation of BORN's terror campaign, after Korshunov replaced Tikhonov as the group's leader.

The assassination of Judge Chuvashov

Eight days after the murder of Khutorskoi, Isaev and Baklagin of BORN's Northern Group ambushed two young men at the Nauka stadium in northern Moscow. One was shot dead, the other escaped. Unknown to the killers, their victim was Muslim Abdullaev, a native of Dagestan and a former world kickboxing champion.[59] This attack may have been intended as a kind of retaliation for Tikhonov's arrest, but it actually strengthened the case against him. The idea of killing both Khutorskoi and some Caucasian athletes had been discussed by Tikhonov and Khasis in conversations recorded by the FSB.[60] The murders were compelling evidence that Tikhonov had not acted alone.

The last doubts were dispelled by BORN's next attack. For some time, the group had discussed the idea of a strike against the judiciary. One obvious target was Judge Petr Shtunder, who had conducted the first trial of the Ryno-Skachevskii gang in 2008 and that of Mikhail Volkov of OB-88 in 2002. Surprisingly, Volkov persuaded his comrades that Shtunder had been a fair judge and did not deserve summary justice. Instead, they turned to Judge Vladimir Usov, who handed down the verdict against the perpetrators of the Cherkizovskii market bombing, but it proved impossible to obtain his private address.[61] Eventually, they settled upon Eduard Chuvashov, a judge of the Moscow City Court, who had recently handed down prison sentences in two high-profile murder cases of prominent neo-Nazi gangs: the White Wolves, which he heard from October 2009 to February 2010; and the second trial of the Ryno-Skachevskii gang, which ended on 8 April.[62] The furore around the sentences in the nationalist blogosphere was aggravated by a courtroom exchange between Chuvashov and Ivan Strel'nikov, a member of the White Wolves. When Strel'nikov defended the killing of immigrants by

referring to their 'mentality,' Chuvashov quipped that 'Russians also have such a mentality that one needs sometimes to hang and kill these Russians, who travel abroad.'[63] This exchange, usually taken out of context, was widely distributed in the nationalist blogosphere. On 24 January 2010, Aleksei Baranovskii's blog 'Soberminded' posted a recording of Chuvashov's words alongside the judge's photograph and address.[64] On the basis of the transcript, 'Soberminded' accused Chuvashov of Russophobia and of calling for the killing of ethnic Russians. This ill-founded allegation triggered a heated discussion thread about vengeance. One contributor declared that shooting the judge would be 'an excessively mild measure.'[65]

BORN struck at about 9 am on the morning of 12 April 2010. As Chuvashov was leaving for work, he was confronted by Aleksei Korshunov on the stairwell outside his apartment. Korshunov fired two shots, first in the chest, and then in the head. The judge died instantly.[66] Like that of Stanislav Markelov, the assassination of Chuvashov became a major political event. The killing of a federal judge was not only an attack on the judiciary. It was also a challenge to the state, as Oleg Sviridenko, the chairman of the Arbitration Court, pointed out at Chuvashov's funeral on 14 April.[67] President Medvedev responded with a clear signal to the security forces. 'Everything necessary will be done,' he vowed, 'to ensure that the organisers and the perpetrators of this cynical murder are found and punished.'[68] The result was a wide-ranging crackdown on the ultranationalist milieu during the weeks that followed.

Thanks to Baranovskii's inflammatory post, Russkii Obraz was singled out for attention. One day after the murder, Galina Kozhevnikova, SOVA Center's leading expert on radical nationalism, told Radio Liberty that 'we learned about Judge Chuvashov after threats were made against him on a website close to Russkii Obraz.' Soberminded's post, she explained, distorted Chuvashov's words in order to accuse him of Russophobia. The result was a 'huge number of aggressive comments.'[69] Baranovskii compounded the damage by announcing that Chuvashov had been killed by the same gun that had been used against Markelov, a claim that was immediately rejected by the investigators.[70]

One of the first to be caught in the dragnet was Sergei Erzunov, the lead singer of *Khuk Sprava*, who was confronted outside his workplace by a team of FSB agents on 15 April. According to Erzunov's blog, he was questioned intensely for 12 hours by a rotating team of interrogators.[71] The resulting transcript constituted a demolition of Tikhonov's efforts to present himself as an innocent victim framed by corrupt police. Not only did Tikhonov express nationalist and racist views; he also regularly carried a weapon, and he was a veteran of OB-88, an organisation 'known in rightist circles for its 'direct actions,' namely beatings, infliction of injuries and its killings of "non-Slavs".'[72]

Five days later, a team of armed FSB agents seized Il'ya Goryachev in a Moscow café.[73] Under interrogation, he provided a wealth of new information about the neo-Nazi underworld. He shed light on shadowy figures like 'Sergei Sergeevich' Nikulkin, the Mestnye activist who had served with Tikhonov in OB-88. Once again, Goryachev endeavoured to counterpose his own moderation to the fanaticism of the paramilitaries. He claimed that he had been

threatened by Golubev, who condemned Russkii Obraz's concert in Bolotnaya Square as appeasement of the regime and as a repudiation of armed struggle. Yet Goryachev's own testimony provided abundant evidence of Russkii Obraz's complicity in that struggle. He recalled how he had arranged for both Tikhonov and Khasis to take knife-fighting lessons from Russkii Obraz's head of security, Egor Gorshkov. He acknowledged that he had read excerpts from 'Strategy 2020,' Tikhonov's manifesto for a terrorist struggle against the state. Implausibly, Goryachev claimed that he had offered editorial suggestions about the inclusion of 'legal methods of struggle' in a document whose entire purpose was the vindication of revolutionary violence.[74]

In a sign of his desperation, Goryachev now drew the attention of his interrogators to his friends in high places. During his first interrogation in November 2009, Goryachev had said nothing about his involvement in the Kremlin's 'managed nationalism.' He may have hoped that his discretion would make it easier for his patrons to intervene behind the scenes. Instead they had abandoned him. Now, alone in an interrogation room in the Prosecutor's Office, he added a handwritten postscript to the transcript, in which he proclaimed his links to the presidential administration. He alleged that Leonid Simunin, the Mestnye activist, was both Russkii Obraz's supervisor and a semi-criminal figure who had sought out Tikhonov's services as a debt collector and a supplier of weapons:

> In the summer of 2009, I introduced L. Simunin to Nikita Tikhonov at the former's request for the possible 'knocking out' of money by Tikhonov from Simunin's debtors. L. Simunin supervises the youth movement Mestnye for the presidential administration, which he combines with the unofficial supervision of the Russkii Obraz movement. In about October 2009, Leonid Simunin asked me to speak with Nikita Tikhonov about the possibility of acquiring a military pistol.[75]

This was a warning both to Krasnov and the Kremlin. Goryachev was a dangerous witness, whose high-level connections made him a hazard to the investigation. His knowledge of the inner workings of 'managed nationalism' also gave him the power to cause major embarrassment to the regime.

The mask of moderation

As the pressure mounted, Russkii Obraz's activity dwindled. The scale of the crackdown disrupted both its financial affairs and its activist networks. Amongst those detained in a roundup of ultranationalists were not only rank-and-file militants but also several financial benefactors of the nationalist movement.[76] One sign of Russkii Obraz's disarray was the stagnation of its website, which was updated less frequently during the spring and summer of 2010. Another was the diminution of provocative activity in the public arena. In 2009, Russkii Obraz and its ally Soprotivlenie had contributed to a surge in the incidence of racist graffiti and stickers. Their sorties, which served both as propaganda and as a kind of initiation test for new recruits, had virtually ceased by the autumn of 2010. SOVA

Center's annual report would attribute a sharp decline in recorded instances of ideologically motivated vandalism 'to the reduction of graffiti activism by supporters of Russkii Obraz and Soprotivlenie.'[77]

The curtailment of Russkii Obraz's public militancy coincided with a dramatic reorientation of its activism from the neo-Nazi underground to charity. During 2010, its central organisation and its remaining regional branches began to perform three kinds of social services. The first was aid to orphanages and children's hospitals.[78] The second was the hosting of sporting events, such as mini-football tournaments, for children and adolescents.[79] The third was blood donations, a strategy also pursued by Russkii Obraz's former ally, Rossiya Molodaya.[80] These measures were designed to ingratiate Russkii Obraz with state structures that then were engaged in major campaigns, supported by television advertising, on the importance of child adoption and blood donation.[81] The effect, as Galina Kozhevnikova noted at the time, was to project an image of Russkii Obraz as a paragon of social virtue and an ally of the state. This rebranding made it harder for law enforcement agencies to target its representatives.[82]

The new face of Russkii Obraz was unveiled at its first formal congress, which was held in Moscow's Izmailovo hotel on 11–12 September 2010. Attended by 60 delegates from 10 regions, it provided a pretext for a fundamental revision of the organisation's official goals. On the level of activism, it announced a new civic initiative, 'Our space,' which was ostensibly dedicated to the protection both of the environment and cultural heritage.[83] In reality, it was an attempt to exploit the growing popularity of the ecological movement, which had transformed local activists like Evgeniya Chirikova, the leader of the movement in defence of Khimki forest, into national political figures. At the same time, Russkii Obraz underlined its hostility to the extra-systemic opposition. It publicly rejected the idea of joining Strategy-31, the coalition of National Bolsheviks and liberal rights-defenders who demonstrated in Moscow's Triumphal Square on the 31st of every relevant month in defence of Article 31 of the constitution, which guaranteed the right to freedom of assembly.[84] For over a year, Strategy-31 had been a space for the renewal of dialogue between nationalists and the anti-Putin opposition.[85] Russkii Obraz was signalling to the Kremlin that it would obstruct this convergence.

Instead, Russkii Obraz positioned itself to participate in parliamentary politics. In his concluding speech to the congress, Goryachev had nothing to say about the IRA or 'knightly orders.' His preferred models were now European rightist parties, whose experience in national legislatures and the European parliament was 'extremely valuable for us.' Vowing that 'we must follow the same path,' Goryachev unveiled a new internet project, *Pravyi mir* (Right World), which was intended to systematise the experience and lessons of European rightists who had gained a foothold in legislatures. But no sooner had he conjured up this tempting prospect than he announced his resignation as a Russkii Obraz's coordinator, a move that he presented as a return to the movement's original 'democratic management.'[86]

Russkii Obraz's new ambitions found expression in a 'Declaration of Russian Nationalist Organisations,' which was promulgated jointly with the remnants of

DPNI at a conference in Moscow's Marriott hotel on 28 September.[87] This document was both a kind of manifesto for a new nationalist coalition and an appeal to the authorities for 'the integration of nationalists into the political system.' Its central argument was that the political exclusion of nationalists had brought the country to the brink of civil war. Carefully avoiding any reference to Russkii Obraz's links to Tikhonov and the neo-Nazi underground, the declaration held up Primorskie Partizany ('Far East Partisans') as a bogeyman.[88] During the first half of 2010, this band of youths had staged a series of attacks on police in the Russian Far East, killing two and wounding three.[89] Their campaign ended on 11 June 2010, when they were surrounded by a massive contingent of special forces and armoured vehicles at an apartment building in Ussuriisk. Two of the 'partisans' committed suicide; the other two surrendered. In the public imagination, however, they acquired an aura of popular avengers and their killings of police evoked considerable sympathy.[90] In particular, the Primorskie Partizany received sympathetic coverage on some DPNI websites and blogs.[91] Exploiting official anxiety over this fact, the Declaration of Russian Nationalist Organisations contended that the kind of anti-state violence committed by the Primorskie Partizany was a direct result of the denial of political representation to Russian nationalists. The obstruction of pathways to peaceful change and the 'persecution of any manifestation of nationalism' had created a 'growth medium' for the appearance of new partisans. In a conciliatory gesture to the authorities, the signatories generously offered their services as a bulwark against terror:

> In these conditions we consider it essential to unite the efforts of Russian nationalists in a struggle against the 'creeping' civil war. We are ready to do everything possible for the consolidation of all influential and responsible Russian nationalist organisations for the sake of working out a common political platform, for the sake of creating a front of resistance to the impending chaos.

In return, the declaration demanded concessions from the authorities. Echoing Goryachev's speech to Russkii Obraz's recent congress, it praised European governments for recognising that confrontation with nationalists was 'unproductive.' The creation of European-style nationalist parties, their participation in elections and their integration into the political system would be 'a blessing for the country.' To achieve this transformation, the declaration set out a series of reform proposals. Some of them, such as an end to constraints on mass protest, freedom to participate in political life, and the simplification of registration procedures for political parties, echoed the demands of the liberal opposition. Others, such as the award of the status of 'political prisoner' to nationalist convicts and an 'amnesty for Russian political prisoners,' were clearly intended to curb the repression that threatened Russkii Obraz and its allies in the neo-Nazi underground.[92]

The declaration was central to a bid by Russkii Obraz to become the core of a broad, mainstream nationalist movement. According to Aleksei Mikhailov, Russkii Obraz's new coordinator, the declaration was 'the first step towards the formation of a wide coalition of diverse organisations, speaking out in a single

front in the struggle for political representation.'[93] This effort required a substantial readjustment of Russkii Obraz's public ideology. Instead of esoteric allusions to the Third Reich and blueprints for a Russian version of apartheid, Russkii Obraz now employed the language of the 'national democrats,' who stood for the dismantling of authoritarian controls and the democratisation of the political system. Instead of emphasising its uniqueness, Russkii Obraz now stressed the values that it shared with other nationalist groupings. In his speech, Evgenii Valyaev contended that both Russkii Obraz and DPNI were 'model examples of rightist organisations.' Both were 'secular organisations, which defend democratic, one might even say, European values, upholding the right of our citizens to be a nation, speaking out against international globalisation.'[94] The plausibility of this claim was enhanced by the presence of Konstantin Krylov, the leader of Russkoe Obshchestvennoe Dvizhenie (ROD), the most authoritative rights-defence organisation in the nationalist milieu. In his speech after the signing ceremony, Krylov drew attention to the fact that nationalist organisations were coalescing around the defence of the rights of Russian people.[95] Here was an issue that could unite defenders of neo-Nazi 'political soldiers' and advocates of political liberalisation.

Hopes that Russkii Obraz had a future as a European-style nationalist party were bolstered by its leaders' continuing access to official forums. On 18 October 2010, Evgenii Valyaev took part in a round-table at the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation. The subject of discussion was 'the internet as a means of exposing "sore points" of society.' Valyaev was able to mix with an array of prominent public figures, including two governors, Mikhail Men' from Ivanovo and Nikita Belykh from Kirov. Both addressed the plenary session, which also heard presentations from prominent pro-Kremlin intellectuals like the political consultant Gleb Pavlovskii and the journalist Maksim Shevchenko. Valyaev's turn to speak came at the next session, which was divided into sections. His subject was the experience of the website pravoslova.info, which he presented as 'an experiment in the sociological monitoring of the rights-defence theme and inter-ethnic relations.'[96] This 'sociological monitoring' was made possible by a grant from the Kremlin's support programme for civil society, and it had provided a platform for Valyaev to project Russkii Obraz's views to a wider audience.[97]

Another reason for optimism was the plight of *Novaya Gazeta*, the newspaper that had taken a lead in exposing Russkii Obraz's neo-fascist ideology. In January 2010, at the height of the media storm that had followed the arrest of Tikhonov and Khasis, it had published the results of an investigation of Russkii Obraz's journey from the neo-Nazi music scene to the front lines of nationalist politics. It also drew attention to Russkii Obraz's integration into the Kremlin's managed nationalism.

> In the regime there are people who are interested in cooperation with ultra-rightists for the sake of the 'pacification' of the leftist and liberal non-systemic opposition. And ultra-rightists are interested in the possibility of their legitimisation. Accordingly, Russkii Obraz reskilled itself as a structure that mediates between the regime and Nazis.

To substantiate its case that the Kremlin was flirting with neo-Nazis, *Novaya Gazeta* provided detailed evidence of Russkii Obraz's racist ideology. In particular, it quoted excerpts from the party's 2009 programme, which called for the imposition of racial segregation and a ban on mixed-race marriages.[98] The intention was to expose the convictions that lurked behind Russkii Obraz's anti-fascist, anti-extremist facade. According to *Novaya Gazeta*, 'we expected that after this publication, Roskomnadzor [the state body responsible for media oversight] would concern itself with the fact of the existence of the website of Russkii Obraz and the Prosecutor's Office would begin an investigation leading to a launching of a criminal case.'[99]

The newspaper succeeded in provoking a response, but not the one that it had anticipated. Rozkomnadzor duly submitted the article for expert analysis, which concluded that 'it contains statements aimed at the incitement of social, racial and national enmity, and propagandising exclusivity, supremacy, and inferiority of a person on the basis of his social, national, or racial affiliation.' On the basis of this finding, Roskomnadzor issued an official warning on 30 March not to Russkii Obraz but to *Novaya Gazeta* for 'extremism.'[100] It was an ominous development, because a media outlet could be shut down after only two warnings. *Novaya Gazeta* challenged the ruling in several legal forums. After the Taganka Court attempted to shift the case to the Arbitration Court, it initiated a civil action, which was rejected in September.[101] Announcing an appeal to the Supreme Court, the newspaper lamented that 'it turns out that it is simpler for the state to arraign a newspaper for extremism than to struggle against real Nazis.'[102]

Soon after the defeat of *Novaya Gazeta*'s civil action, Russkii Obraz scored a legal victory in Rostov-on-Don. On 28 March 2010, Russkii Obraz had hosted an 'All-Slavic Tournament of Realistic Fighting.' Such tournaments were a major site for the interaction of ultranationalist political activists and skinhead fighters. On this occasion, the building was surrounded and stormed by masked OMON troops, who forced both participants and spectators to stand against a wall with their hands up. Many of the detainees were then taken to the local police station, where they were photographed and fingerprinted by agents of the anti-extremism Tsentr-E. For Russkii Obraz, this raid was a double humiliation. It exposed its diminished ability to shield its radical constituency from repression. And it cast doubts on its trustworthiness. Some of the detainees openly accused Russkii Obraz of setting a trap for them at the behest of the security organs.[103] Nine months later, Russkii Obraz was vindicated in a Rostov court, which found that the OMON had acted illegally. Accordingly, the court ordered the destruction of personal data acquired during the raid.[104]

The 2010 Russian March

Russkii Obraz played a prominent role in the preparations for the next Russian March on 4 November 2010. This time there was no question of preferential treatment from the authorities and a Kolovrat concert within earshot of the Kremlin. The route along the Shevchenko embankment, where Russkii Obraz's columns had marched alongside Narodnyi Soyuz in 2008, had once again been allocated

to Nashi.[105] Banished from the city centre, Russkii Obraz joined DPNI and Slavyanskaya Sila (the new name for Dmitrii Demushkin's recently banned Slavyanskii Soyuz) on the organising committee for the march in Lyublino, the drab suburb in south-east Moscow.[106] Exploiting their media skills, Russkii Obraz's leaders worked assiduously to raise expectations about the march and to shape its political meaning. In the process, they also reasserted their claim to speak for the mainstream nationalist milieu. On 28 October 2010, Goryachev exalted the march's political significance in an article for *Russkii Obozrevatel'*, the website edited by the influential nationalist ideologue, Egor Kholmogorov. Goryachev's central contention was that nationalist marchers were superior to their rivals in the anti-Putin opposition and in loyalist structures. On the one hand, they were numerically superior to the liberal and radical leftist opposition, which was unable to attract more than hundreds of protesters to its actions. Goryachev ignored the fact that Strategy-31 demonstrations had repeatedly attracted over a thousand since May 2010.[107] On the other, Goryachev claimed that the Russian marchers were morally superior to the youths enlisted by pro-Kremlin organisations like Nashi, which relied upon coercion and bribery to fabricate displays of people power. Russian nationalists constituted a large group of idealistic, autonomous actors. In a nod to the partisan underground, Goryachev noted that they included 'political soldiers':

> Ideologically motivated people, political soldiers, come to the Russian march. They don't need to be lured at a cheap price or bussed in from Moscow region campuses under threat of failing an exam. People come to the Russian march by themselves, in spite of all the obstacles created by the regime.[108]

Goryachev's arguments were elaborated in a programmatic statement, 'For Your Freedom and Ours!,' which Russkii Obraz presented as 'our manifesto of the Russian march.' The title was a Soviet dissident slogan, which had been inscribed on a banner held by the seven demonstrators who protested in Red Square on 25 August 1968 against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.[109] According to the manifesto, these words were addressed both to Russian civil society and to 'thousands of Russian political prisoners.' But the manifesto was also addressed to the authorities. Claiming that 'there is nothing living in the political space of the Russian Federation, only sad imitations and political corpses,' it exhorted the Kremlin to embrace Russian nationalism as a 'living ideology' that might mobilise the populace behind President Medvedev's modernisation programme.[110]

The march was a triumph. Despite constant rain, it attracted a crowd that dwarfed recent liberal opposition protests. Observers from SOVA Center counted 5,500 marchers.[111] Some nationalists put the figure as high as 15,000.[112] Vladimir Tor (Kralin), the prominent DPNI activist, boasted that it was 'unquestionably the biggest mass demonstration by Russian nationalists in the modern history of Russia.'[113] No less important was the fact that it ended the schism that had split the movement and dispersed crowds between rival events in 2008 and 2009. The three main columns, 'the backbone of the march,' represented Russkii Obraz, DPNI, and Slavyanskaya Sila.[114]

Photograph 5 'Labour Makes Free': Russkii Obraz's column at the 2010 Russian March in Lyublino (credit: SOVA Center)

As usual, Russkii Obraz's column projected contradictory messages. Public activists like Il'ya Goryachev, Dmitrii Taratorin, and the Valyaev brothers marched alongside hundreds of anonymous skinheads, whose faces were obscured by hoods, balaclavas, and medical masks.[115] The front rank held two banners emblazoned with slogans in white letters on a black background. One was Russkii Obraz's official slogan for the march, 'For your freedom and ours!' The other was 'Labour makes free' (*Trud delaet svobodnym*), which Russkii Obraz had first employed at its May Day procession in 2009.[116] To uninformed observers, this was a platitude like 'Our honour is named truth,' the SS motto that decorated Russkii Obraz's t-shirts. But neo-Nazi marchers would have recognised the infamous words of welcome at the entrance gate of the Nazi extermination camp at Auschwitz: 'Arbeit macht frei.'[117]

Soon after the Russian March, Goryachev departed for the Balkans. Ostensibly he was travelling to conduct research for his suspended doctoral (*kandidatskaya*) thesis. The real reason, he later acknowledged, was the mounting threats in the nationalist blogosphere, which had been provoked by leaks about his testimony against Tikhonov and Khasis.[118] A few months later, when complete transcripts of his interrogations appeared on the internet, the journalist Evgenii Levkovich, who was well-connected in nationalist circles, reported that 'many people' attributed Goryachev's flight to his 'fear of vengeance by nationalists for his treachery.'[119] It was widely rumoured that Goryachev had capitulated after the FSB discovered gay pornography on his laptop.[120] One neo-Nazi site noted that Goryachev had 'rejected suicide as a form of repentance' and offered a veiled incitement in the form of a warning that the security forces regarded contact with him as punishable under the articles of the criminal code dealing with homicide and physical violence.[121]

One result of Goryachev's departure was that Russkii Obraz was unable to exploit the riot in Manezhnaya Square on 11 December 2010, the most spectacular

show of force by nationalist crowds in Moscow in over 17 years. The pretext for this tumult was a violent brawl between a group of Russian football fans and a group of Caucasians on the night of 6 December. By the time that police arrived, 28-year-old Egor Sviridov had been shot dead, and one of his companions was left with serious injuries.[122] Indignation over the killing was magnified by the prompt release of all of the assailants, except for the suspected gunman.[123] The potential for unrest was demonstrated the following evening, when some 1,000 football hooligans blocked traffic on Leningradskii Prospekt before being dispersed by OMON anti-riot police.[124]

This incident precipitated intense discussion in the nationalist blogosphere. While Russkii Obraz was quiescent, the former DPNI leader Aleksandr Belov seized the moment, issuing a declaration on 8 December that was a clear incitement to ethnic violence. It consisted of three exhortations. The first was a call for a show of unity by coming to Sviridov's funeral. The second was 'to strike first,' because it was better to be imprisoned than dead. 'Talking to beasts is futile,' he added. 'They only understand force.' The third was about the need for weapons. Russia had become a 'field of military action,' and those who went about their daily business without a knife or a gun were guilty of criminal negligence.[125] During the ensuing days, these incendiary propositions shaped discussion in the nationalist blogosphere and social networks about an action in Manezhnaya Square, which was to follow the memorial ceremony.

The authorities were clearly unprepared for the scale or the intensity of the disturbances on 11 December. They may have been lulled into complacency by the peaceful and subdued crowd of Spartak supporters that had assembled at 11 am for the authorised memorial ceremony, near the scene of Sviridov's murder on Kronshtadtskii boulevard. Three hours later, a more aggressive, overtly nationalist crowd began to coalesce on Manezhnaya Square, beneath the walls of the Kremlin and alongside the Okhotnyi Ryad shopping complex. The place and the timing of this apparently spontaneous action had been prepared by discussion on the nationalist blogosphere.[126] Like the Russian March one month earlier, this crowd was distinguished by the prevalence of shaven heads, masked faces, and traditional street fighting attire. The chants were also familiar to observers of nationalist demonstrations: 'Russia for the Russians!', 'Moscow for Muscovites!' and 'In Moscow the landlord is Russian!'[127] Many carried placards with a photograph of Sviridov and the words, 'Russians, it is time to act.'[128] Another was more explicit: 'Egor Sviridov was killed by Caucasians. Russian, it is time to fight back.'[129] For the next hour, these nationalists brought their own kind of action to the walls of the Kremlin. 'On Saturday,' reported a journalist from *Izvestiya*, 'the centre of the capital was transformed into a battlefield.'[130] The impression of a military conflagration was enhanced by the flares, smoke bombs, and firework rockets set off by some militants.[131] While this pandemonium raged, elements in the crowd unleashed racist violence. When several dark-skinned cleaners were spotted raking snow off a balcony of the Moskva hotel, some began to shout, 'Your children will answer for this death!'[132] Others exacted vengeance in the present. One band of 30 fighters savagely attacked a group of Caucasian men celebrating a birthday on nearby Mokhovaya street, knocking them to the ground and kicking their defenceless bodies.[133]

The security forces took several hours to regain control of the square. Unlike at pro-democracy demonstrations, there were no contingents of OMON waiting to overwhelm the crowd. When nationalists began to converge on Manezhnaya Square, they were met by a handful of police. One officer, holding a megaphone, called on them to disperse. He was challenged by a ringleader of the militants, also speaking through a megaphone, who issued an ultimatum: 'Which of your leaders will answer for this murder? We would like him to be here. We do not want confrontation. We want a response to our questions.'[134] Despite this avowal of peaceful intentions, violence was already in progress. When OMON troops intervened to rescue the Caucasians being assaulted on Mokhovaya street, the assailants threw smoke canisters to cover their escape.[135] No sooner had the victims been led to ambulances than their tormentors returned in force to resume the beating, leaving the police rescuers struggling to defend the injured.[136]

The culmination of the riot was a kind of public negotiation between a masked militant, who presented himself as 'an ordinary Russian man,' and General Vladimir Kolokol'tsev, the head of the Moscow police. By then, a stream of buses full of OMON troops had converged on the streets around the square. At first, the mob ignored Kolokol'tsev's call to disperse, but it was more responsive to his promise to investigate the murder of Sviridov.[137] Soon afterwards, the crowd began to retreat from the square, obeying the orders of ringleaders to make their way to the metro.[138]

By comparison with its earlier panegyrics to 'Political Soldiers' and the 'Russian Resistance,' Russkii Obraz's response to this tumult was muted. In a statement uploaded to the group's website, Aleksei Mikhailov celebrated the confrontation in the Square not as a battle but as a kind of civic breakthrough: 'there was freedom, a show of force, a normal dialogue with the authorities, the recognition of our demands.' He rejected the claims of some bloggers that the tumult was the beginning of a national revolution. Rather, it was a 'European format' protest, 'the first step towards a genuine civil society.'[139] To reinforce this message, Russkii Obraz made its major statement on the affair as a civil society actor. Its representatives had been present at hearings in the Moscow Public Chamber, when the city's Deputy Prosecutor had expressed exasperation that many Muscovites viewed the law enforcement organs as accomplices of ethnic criminals.[140] In response, Russkii Obraz and Konstantin Krylov's Russkoe Obshchestvennoe Dvizhenie (Russian Public Movement, ROD) submitted a public statement to the Prosecutor's Office. Listing alleged cases of ethnic crime where the police had failed to act, incompetently investigated, or enabled perpetrators to escape justice, it called for the Prosecutor's Office to establish 'normal working relations with the institutions of civil society.'[141]

Disgrace

The reasons for Goryachev's sudden departure became clearer in early 2011, when scanned transcripts of his interrogations appeared on the internet.[142] It was widely suspected that they had been leaked by Tikhonov's defence team.[143] What

is certain is that Russkii Obraz's reputation in the nationalist milieu was tarnished by the exposure of Goryachev's cooperation with the security organs and his detailed descriptions of leading personalities in the neo-Nazi underworld.

Moderates cut their ties with a movement whose violence threatened to undermine their own quest for respectability. On 28 January 2011, Russkii Obraz was repudiated by the most prominent rights-defence organisation in the nationalist milieu, Konstantin Krylov's ROD, which had recently begun to cooperate with Russkii Obraz. Now ROD issued a sweeping condemnation of Goryachev's leadership. While expressing sympathy for the predicament of those 'honest people' in Russkii Obraz 'whose trust had been cruelly and despicably betrayed,' ROD condemned the duplicity of Goryachev's conduct and political strategy. On a personal level, he had betrayed his comrades, either by levelling false accusations against them, or by lying about his own commitment to legal struggle. On a political level, his leadership had transformed Russkii Obraz into a case study of the perils of combining public activism and armed struggle:

> Just as it impossible to be 'a little bit pregnant,' so one cannot be 'a little bit outside the law.' A Russian nationalist engaged in public politics is constantly in the zone of attention of the law enforcement organs and special services. Any participation by him in any kind of illegal activities, any personal approach to representatives of the 'underground,' can be fatal not only for him but for those who trust him, and it can also cause serious harm to the entire Russian movement.

Nowhere did ROD contemplate the possibility that the 'Russian movement' was also harmed by its tacit acceptance of the underground. It confined its criticism to public politicians, whose 'only possible model of action is complete legality, honesty, and openness.' ROD concluded by announcing the suspension of all joint projects and the cessation of all contacts with the rogue organisation.[144]

The same argument was made in more vitriolic terms by Vladimir Tor (Kralin), a DPNI leader whose participation in the New Year's Eve Strategy-31 demonstration had earned him 20 days in detention. Soon after his release, Tor used his LiveJournal blog to excoriate Goryachev as a 'Judas,' who had earned damnation, either as a result of his false testimony or his betrayal of the trust of comrades. Like ROD, Tor condemned Goryachev for failing to respect the demarcation between the movement's legal and paramilitary wings:

> It is no secret that the Russian Movement (almost on the model of the Irish Sinn Fein and IRA) consists of two wings: the wing of legal political struggle and, independently of it, the conspiratorial partisan underground. It is obvious that it is impossible to sit simultaneously on two chairs: everyone makes a choice.

Goryachev was guilty of far more than the transgression of boundaries: 'Here is a blatant betrayal of his comrades BY THE LEADER of a nationalist organisation.' Hinting at vengeance, Tor suggested that Goryachev, like Judas, hang himself

from an aspen tree. 'In a word,' he declared, 'be damned, you scum. You are not one of us – you hapless pawn of the security services.'[145]

Three days later, a similar anathema was issued by Aleksandr Sevast'yanov, the ultranationalist ideologue who had been one of Russkii Obraz's earliest mentors. For Sevast'yanov, betrayal of collaborators to the police was a violation of 'an absolute taboo.' He was particularly incensed by claims that Goryachev had acted out of a noble desire to protect Russkii Obraz from the repression that the security apparatus was directing at Tikhonov's circle of acquaintances:

> What could Goryachev fear? The loss of the Kremlin's trust, the respectable image of RO? It's laughable. At *such* a level and with *such* personnel, one should aspire not to respectability but, on the contrary, to extreme radicalism if one wishes to be trusted by the masses. The proximity of Tikhonov to Russkii Obraz only raised the ratings of this organisation; one needed to cling to it with both hands, to underline it, to make him a hero and a martyr rather than distancing oneself from this man.

Even if Goryachev's primary motive was bringing a murderer to justice, 'he could not be considered anything but a traitor to the Russian cause.' The only choice for Russkii Obraz, if it wanted to remain part of the broader nationalist movement, was to ostracise the traitor. Sevast'yanov concluded with a vow that 'henceforth I will have no relations whatsoever with RO until it gives a principled appraisal of Goryachev and rids RO of his shadow.'[146]

Undeterred by this barrage, Russkii Obraz refused to repudiate Goryachev. Instead it launched a PR counter-offensive. In a statement on his blog on 29 January, Evgenii Valyaev responded to the accusations. On the one hand, he justified Goryachev's collaboration by asserting that Russkii Obraz was a 'political organisation, which is engaged in politics, not political terror.' Neither Tikhonov nor Khasis belonged to its ranks. On the other, he affirmed the moral virtues of Goryachev and also of 'Oi-Ei' Erzunov, Khuk Sprava's lead singer, whose candid interrogation transcript had also appeared on the internet. Both were 'devoted sons of Rus,' whose links to Tikhonov testified not to their political radicalism but to their loyalty to friends.[147] A few days later, Valyaev revised his position in a long article in the journal *Shuum*. His principal target was Vladimir Tor (Kralin), the DPNI activist and participant in the Strategy-31 protests, who had recently excoriated Goryachev as 'Judas.' Valyaev derided Tor, who was 'little respected amongst rightists,' for behaving as if his recent incarceration made him a moral arbiter for the movement. According to Valyaev, Tor's attack on Russkii Obraz was a product of jealousy of its success and of resentment at its lack of deference to veteran nationalist leaders like himself. It also demonstrated a failure to understand that Russkii Obraz was not merely a political structure but also 'an entire diaspora,' a virtually indestructible social formation which could not expel one of its members merely because of moral lapses. Valyaev then concluded with an extraordinary tribute to Tikhonov and Khasis. Not only did he wish them well, but he declared that 'such [people] are needed at liberty, they are needed in government, they must change Russia.'[148]

The Tikhonov–Khasis Trial

No previous prosecution of Russian nationalists provoked the public controversy that raged around the trial of Nikita Tikhonov and Evgeniya Khasis. The trial, which began in the Moscow City Court on 15 February 2011, became a cause celebre for both liberals and nationalists. In a statement on the second anniversary of the murder of Markelov and Baburova, *Novaya Gazeta* welcomed the trial as an opportunity to settle scores with the perpetrators of neo-Nazi terror and their official patrons:

> This will not merely be a high-profile trial. It will be a political trial – an open trial of Russian fascism, which – under the affectionate supervision of the authorities – has evolved from street clowns and snivelling thugs who stabbed Tadjik cleaners to combat terrorist groups, whose goal is to create a situation of chaos and terror, whose method is the murder of public figures, journalists, lawyers, judges, prosecutors, law enforcement officers, and officials.[149]

Habitually critical of the security services and official abuses, *Novaya Gazeta* clearly supported the prosecution's version of events. Its deputy editor, Sergei Sokolov, took a personal interest in the case and repeatedly castigated Tikhonov's defenders as apologists for neo-Nazism.[150] With no less certitude, nationalist bloggers portrayed the defendants as innocent victims who had been framed as part of a conspiracy to destroy the nationalist movement. This line was elaborated by a phalanx of nationalist opinion-makers led by Aleksei Baranovskii, Aleksandr Sevast'yanov, and Natal'ya Kholmogorova, who criticised the trial as a travesty of justice.

Their position was reinforced by numerous procedural irregularities. Judge Aleksandr Zamashnyuk made no pretence of even-handedness, and the defence lawyers repeatedly called for his removal from the case.[151] There were also well-founded concerns about the integrity of the jury. One of its members resigned, complaining that several of her colleagues were former employees of the security agencies, and that two of them were conducting 'propaganda work' in favour of a guilty verdict.[152] Even some liberals were disconcerted by the conduct of the trial.[153]

Doubts about the case against Tikhonov were compounded by the scandal that enveloped Il'ya Goryachev, the most important witness for the prosecution. Although he had fled to Serbia, a video of his interrogation was shown to the court. Arguments about the value of this testimony revolved around two subsequent statements made by Goryachev. In the first, signed in August 2010, he claimed that the FSB had forced him to lie about Tikhonov.[154] In the second, written while detained at the Russian-Belorussian border in November 2010, he asserted that the original recantation had been written in response to threats from Tikhonov.[155] This was not implausible. In a leaked recording of an interrogation, Khasis had discussed Sergei 'Oper' Golubev, the leader of the neo-Nazi gang 'Blood and Honour. Combat 18.' According to Khasis, Golubev was torn between remaining

on a 'legal' plane and becoming an underground terrorist. Asked by her interrogator who might become Golubev's first victim, Khasis laughed and exclaimed, 'perhaps Goryachev.'[156]

What made a guilty verdict possible in the Tikhonov–Khasis trial was three things. The most important was their domestic chatter, which had been recorded on eavesdropping devices planted by the FSB and replayed to the jury. Particularly incriminating was their anxious discussion about whether they had been exposed after Mikhail Markelov announced to the media that he knew the identities of his brother's murderers.[157] The impact of this compelling evidence was magnified by their gossip about skinhead leaders and banter about violence. On one occasion, Khasis boasted that 'I will kill them all' if police agents attempted to arrest them.[158] On another, she asked Tikhonov, 'How many people can you kill?' The impression created by these macabre conversations was compounded by video footage of the couple's domestic life: Tikhonov rearranging his armoury and Khasis taking a pistol out of her handbag.[159]

A second pillar of the prosecution case was the testimony of Sergei 'Oper' Golubev. Believed to have gone into hiding, Golubev arrived in court as a prosecution witness on 18 April. His entrance was clearly a shock to Tikhonov, who promptly denied ever having met him. In response, Golubev gave the court a detailed account of their long acquaintance, which began at a Kolovrat concert in 2003. Refuting Tikhonov's denial that he had been part of the skinhead underground, Golubev confirmed that Tikhonov belonged to the neo-Nazi gang, OB-88.[160] During Tikhonov's years in the underground, Golubev had communicated with him on Skype and met him periodically. According to Golubev, Tikhonov had repeatedly invited him to embark on the path of armed struggle against anti-fascists, the police, and bureaucrats. 'Tikhonov thought that terror offered a chance for success,' he explained, 'for the coming to power of Russian nationalists.'[161] One sign of the impact of Golubev's testimony was the reaction of Tikhonov's supporters in the gallery. When Golubev confessed that he had decided to testify after reading transcripts of conversation in which Tikhonov had mused about killing him, a voice shouted out, 'It's a shame he didn't.' As Golubev walked out of the courtroom, Tikhonov and Khasis clapped in mock applause.[162]

A third decisive factor was the reckless conduct of the defendants' sympathisers. On 5 April, Aleksei Baranovskii, the coordinator of Russkii Verdikt, testified that he had spent the day of Markelov's murder with Khasis on a shopping expedition to buy champagne for his birthday.[163] Khasis rushed to confirm the story, which only compounded the damage to her case when the alibi was demolished by the prosecution. Mobile phone logs showed that Baranovskii had spent the day in a different part of Moscow.[164]

The jury's verdict, delivered after six hours of deliberation on 28 April, found the defendants guilty by a narrow margin. By a majority of seven to five, the jury found Tikhonov guilty of the murder of Markelov and Baburova. By eight to four, it found Khasis guilty of involvement in the murders.[165] A week later, Judge Zamashnyuk handed down a life sentence to Tikhonov and 18 years to

Khasis. Both defendants greeted the sentences with bemusement. When Khasis was being led away to a prison van, she shouted that those who had participated in the prosecution and in the trial had 'sentenced themselves' to a punishment that she did not specify.[166]

In the debate that followed the sentencing, few nationalists reflected on the menace posed by the neo-Nazi underground to Russian society and to their own movement. Instead, a new mythology was constructed around Tikhonov and Khasis. This line was codified by Aleksandr Sevast'yanov, the most influential ideologue of the partisan insurgency. Within days of the verdict, Sevast'yanov published a long article titled 'Passing into Legend,' which presented the trial as an epic moral struggle. On the one side were the forces of darkness. Their most diabolical representative was Judge Zamashnyuk, who would go down in Russian history 'with the ineradicable brand of an executioner,' the 'inhuman savagery' of whose sentencing of Tikhonov and Khasis was also 'a life sentence to himself.' Equally culpable were the police investigators and FSB agents, whom Sevast'yanov prudently suggested would be amply rewarded for their role in the imprisonment of the two heroes. He was less restrained about the likely fate of traitors to the cause like Il'ya Goryachev and Sergei Golubev. For their cowardice, they were now 'doomed for life.' In a clear incitement to potential avengers, Sevast'yanov mused that 'henceforth any participant of the Russian movement, whether from the Circle of Admirers of Russian Fine Publications or the mythical BORN, will hardly restrain themselves on encountering any of these Judases.'[167]

Counterposed to these depraved spirits were Tikhonov and Khasis, whom Sevast'yanov turned into 'icons.' Both were incarnations of patriotism. Both had endured the ordeal of arrest and mistreatment without compromising their ideals or betraying their comrades. In Sevast'yanov's rendering, Tikhonov became a kind of superman, a figure out of history books:

> A born leader. A person of a different nature, a different stamp, amongst a sick, degenerating tribe. Such Russian people existed amongst the peers of my father and grandmother, who both served at the front lines. In my generation, I do not know such people, to say nothing of even younger generations, and I was simply astonished on becoming acquainted with Nikita, alas, already during the course of the trial.

Khasis was the perfect match for this titan: 'a beauty, an intelligent mind, reacting swiftly and precisely, passionate in every word and movement.' Displaying his penchant for biological racism, Sevast'yanov reflected that 'the appearance of such people after 20 years of hopelessness and defeat tells us that the resources of the Russian gene pool are not yet depleted, that we, the people, are still capable of resisting the enemy.'[168]

Sevast'yanov prophesied that Tikhonov and Khasis were destined to become symbols of the coming insurrection. Both had 'dreamed of a Russian revolution, a struggle for our national rights and interests.' Far from being the bloodthirsty murderers vilified by the prosecutor and *Novaya Gazeta*, Tikhonov and Khasis

were 'national heroes, innocent victims of an anti-Russian regime and martyrs of the Russian idea.' At liberty, they may have been 'worth entire movements,' but in prison they were paragons of courage and principle, who would inspire others to take up their fallen banner:

> … in the place of Tikhonov and Khasis will arise other young people, who are worthy of them and our common cause. And they will make that very Russian revolution, which will fling open prison doors and set free Nikita and Zhenya and thousands of our other comrades.

For the moment, Sevast'yanov exhulted that 'our movement has its first icons.' These, he noted sarcastically, were a gift from the Kremlin and its henchmen in the security forces and the judiciary: 'By taking from us living people, priceless in their uniqueness, they have given us in return a legendary image, which a generation of Russian nationalists will worship and begin to imitate.'[169]

The cult of Tikhonov and Khasis was reinforced by an array of blogs and websites dedicated to the campaign to free them. The most professional was tihonov-hasis.info, which was titled 'the case of the journalist Nikita Tikhonov and the rights-defender Evgeniya Khasis.'[170] There was also a plethora of LiveJournal blogs, Facebook pages, and Twitter feeds, all filled with information about the daily lives of the prisoners. In turn, Tikhonov and Khasis addressed their sympathisers in a steady stream of private letters and statements about politics, ideology, and the future of the nationalist movement. Members of the neo-Nazi scene provided detailed accounts of their pilgrimages to the labour camps where Tikhonov and Khasis were incarcerated.[171] Others posted photographs of stickers plastered on subway walls, which demanded 'Freedom for Nikita and Zhenya' and were adorned with sketches of the two prisoners fondly embracing.[172]

While this campaign was raging, leftist and liberal opinion largely supported the verdict. After the end of the trial, Oleg Orlov of Memorial's Human Rights Center declared that the defendants were 'real murderers, not ones arbitrarily nominated by someone.' Responding to the efforts of Tikhonov's defenders to blame Chechens for the crime, Orlov pointed out that Markelov had helped to convict Russian army and police officers for abuses in Chechnya, something that earned him admiration in Chechnya and hatred from Russian nationalists.[173] Despite Memorial's clear position, a vocal minority of left-wing militants insisted that Tikhonov and Khasis had been framed. In January 2012, a group of three 'friends of Markelov' – Petr Ryabov, Irina Fedotova, and Kirill Privezentsev – marked the third anniversary of the lawyer's murder with a declaration that cast doubt on the defendants' guilt. Pointing to Markelov's penchant for dangerous cases, they demanded to know the grounds for thinking that his murder was perpetrated 'precisely by [nationalists] and not by special services, not by millionaire-raiders, not by the functionaries of the Kadyrov regime?' The Investigative Committee that had constructed the case against Tikhonov and Khasis, they observed, was the same organisation that had recently claimed implausibly that Boris Berezovskii was behind the murder of Anna Politkovskaya. They concluded that 'the case of the death of Markelov and Baburova remains at the present moment unsolved.'[174]

What did remain unsolved was the relationship of 'managed nationalism' to the murders. Despite their relevance to the case, key figures in the Kremlin's dialogue with the ultranationalist milieu never appeared in court. A video of Goryachev's testimony against Tikhonov was shown to the jury, but the Russian authorities made no effort to secure his extradition from Serbia. Leonid Simunin, the Mestnye leader and Russkii Obraz's alleged Kremlin overseer, had been implicated by Goryachev for requesting a firearm from Tikhonov, but he was not summoned to testify. Nor did the court hear from 'Sergei Sergeevich' Nikulkin, another Mestnye luminary with a dark past.[175] After the verdict was handed down, Sergei Sokolov, the deputy editor of *Novaya Gazeta*, and the lawyers for the victims' families called for an investigation of the role of these elusive figures.[176]

The martyrs

For almost a year, Tikhonov and Khasis fulfilled the heroic expectations of their admirers. In his correspondence from prison, Tikhonov addressed the outside world in the defiant tone of a moral leader of Russian nationalism. In August, he demonstrated his contempt for his captors by praising a recent spate of 'anarchist attacks on the state' – the burning of police cars and buildings – as a patriotic endeavour.[177] One month later, in his last letter from Lefortovo before being sent to a labour camp on the Arctic edge of Siberia, Tikhonov lambasted the accommodations of his former comrades. Tikhonov acknowledged that his own 'Ethical Codex of a Russian Nationalist,' which had been jointly adopted by Russkii Obraz and Blood & Honour in 2009, had been discredited by the unethical conduct of Goryachev and Golubev, the leaders of the two major organisations that had signed the Codex. The problem was that no ideology could bridge the gulf between loyalists and the extra-systemic opposition. He proceeded to criticise the duplicity of Russkii Obraz, which combined radical posturing with loyalty to the regime. He singled out Dmitrii Taratorin (Gleb Borisov), whose *Russkii bunt naveki* had been proclaimed the basis of Russkii Obraz's ideology. Despite his purported radicalism, Taratorin had seemed not to notice the trial of Tikhonov and Khasis. The gulf between Taratorin's words and deeds was a logical consequence of Russkii Obraz's collaboration with the regime against its enemies:

> … It turns out that people with the psychology of loyalists assembled in Russkii Obraz and [Taratorin] are more fond of rebels. Loyalists attack the NBP bunker, the 'Dissenters Marches,' the demonstrations of Strategy-31. For the rebels, for the extra-systemic nationalists, such actions are unacceptable. This is a conceptual abyss. One cannot do the cops' work for them. If you can't shake the regime, don't interfere with others.

For Tikhonov, Russkii Obraz's real ideology was not to be found in Taratorin's posturing, but in the interviews in which Goryachev had asserted that his enemies were not the Kremlin but the left-liberal opposition, and to a lesser degree, the criminals of ethnic diasporas.[178]

The cult around the two convicted murderers went hand-in-hand with the vilification of Russkii Obraz. In his panegyric to Tikhonov and Khasis, Aleksandr Sevast'yanov remarked that 'Russkii Obraz has covered itself with ineradicable shame and henceforth has no future.'[179] For many nationalists, Goryachev's perfidy had made possible the incarceration of the two heroes. One critic tarred the group with the label *Suchii Obraz* ('Bitch's Image'), which quickly proliferated across the nationalist blogosphere.[180] The pariah status of *Suchii Obraz* was dramatised by a confrontation at a nationalist procession on May Day 2011, at the height of the Tikhonov–Khasis trial. When Dmitrii Demushkin, the leader of Slavyanskii Soyuz, spotted Evgenii Valyaev and a group of marchers with Russkii Obraz banners, he tried to drag them out the crowd.[181]

At the same time, Goryachev was target of an intense smear campaign on the internet. In December 2011, the neo-Nazi website Pravye Novosti posted a carefully fabricated interview that had been purportedly conducted with Goryachev by 'Evgenii Lipkovik' (an apparent allusion to Evgenii Levkovich) for 'Moscow NewsDesk,' a fictitious news agency. What lent verisimilitude to this concoction was the mimicry of Russkii Obraz's ideological mannerisms, pretentious historical allusions, and references to 'our diaspora.' Claiming to be 'the spiritual leader of Russkii Obraz,' the fake-Goryachev boasted that 'we are working on a large scale with state structures, from regional functionaries to the highest corridors of security structures.'[182] He also made a confession, unthinkable for a Russian ultra-rightist, of being bisexual, and of idolising Pim Fortuyn, the openly-gay Dutch campaigner against Islamic immigration.[183] Despite several absurd passages, the interview was sufficiently plausible for it to be quoted, a year later, by *Novaya Gazeta*.[184] Russkii Obraz responded to the fabrication with a formal denunciation of *Pravye Novosti*, which it accused of collaboration with the FSB.[185]

Despite the barrage of vilification, Russkii Obraz remained unapologetic about Goryachev's testimony. One token of its defiance was a sticker captioned, 'We will not be broken.' It featured a photograph of eight activists, all wearing Russkii Obraz t-shirts and shorts that exposed Russkii Obraz tattoos on their legs, standing on railway tracks while a train approached.[186] This intransigence was justified by Russkii Obraz's media spokesman, Evgenii Valyaev, who challenged the version of events propounded by Tikhonov's defenders. Eleven days after the sentencing of Tikhonov and Khasis, Valyaev assailed the 'myth' that had been constructed around Tikhonov. The reality, he declared, was that 'Tikhonov committed murder and other crimes and received a sentence.' Far from being a victim of Goryachev's machinations, Tikhonov had consciously chosen 'the path of a nationalist-illegal, the path of armed struggle,' and 'had drawn his friends, his circle, even his loved ones into misfortune.' There was no need, pleaded Valyaev, 'to whitewash Tikhonov completely, to raise him to the rank of a consummate hero, who always did everything well and rightly, and others only caused harm and committed treachery.'[187]

Valyaev's arguments did little to halt the decline of Russkii Obraz. In a long interview with *Novaya Gazeta* in June 2011, Aleksei Mikhailov revealed that as an organisation, Russkii Obraz now comprised 'several hundred people, "a core"

and "an orbit," in Moscow and the regions.' This number, down from the thousand that Goryachev had boasted about one year earlier, was not in itself a problem. 'We are not aiming for a multitude,' explained Mikhailov. 'We seek reliable people, who can unite others around them.' He conceded that the leaking of Goryachev's testimony had set off 'a wave of repugnance,' which had been magnified by provocateurs and rivals. Nevertheless, he claimed that Russkii Obraz's isolation had been exaggerated. Serious nationalist politicians like Vladimir Basmanov (Potkin) had been careful not to sever ties. Provocatively, Mikhailov hinted that Goryachev continued to play a role in the organisation's deliberations. While refusing to clarify the distribution of responsibilities, Mikhailov acknowledged that he consulted with Goryachev 'whose opinion has a certain weight.' Scorning the notion that Russkii Obraz was politically dead, he proceeded to lambast its critics as 'people who have neither a future nor a present.' Those with a future had mastered a theme and knew how to work with it. 'Goryachev,' he added, 'was such a person.'[188]

Mikhailov elaborated his defence of Goryachev in a post on his blog a few days later. His central contention was that the rightist movement needed not only heroes but also 'brains' like Goryachev who were skilled at organisation, communication, and political PR. Such 'brains' were rare in a movement that suffered from an overabundance of internet publicists and 'sub-fuhrers of varying degrees of sanity.' One measure of Goryachev's talents was the 'growth of the resources and authority of RO until last winter.' Another was its unity amid the tribulations of the Tikhonov–Khasis case. According to Mikhailov, a political organiser like Goryachev was not obliged to be a hero. Those who expected leaders of right-wing parties to be fearsome warriors were ignorant of the realities of public life: 'It is time to grow up, enough playing at [Cowboys and] Indians. In real politics, there are other requirements, not those of the world of role-playing games and idealistic fantasies.' When one reader insisted that Goryachev had saved his skin by giving false testimony against the innocent Tikhonov, Mikhailov retorted: 'And what if [Goryachev] did not give false testimony? If [Tikhonov] is not an innocent?' He added that 'there are some who know rather more than what was heard in the course of the trial.'[189]

One week after Mikhailov's interview in *Novaya Gazeta*, the security organs tightened the screws on Russkii Obraz's inner circle. On 29 June 2011, agents from the FSB's 2nd Directorate (Defence of the Constitutional System) targeted three members of the organisation, including Mikhailov himself. This operation, which was formally part of the investigation of the murders of Judge Chuvashov and Ivan Khutorskoi, entailed searches of apartments, the seizure of computer hard drives, and interrogations. The aim was clearly to uncover more information about neo-Nazi networks and their links to the Kremlin supervisors of 'managed nationalism.' Mikhailov was asked about Russkii Obraz's political stance and the broader far-right milieu by two agents, who referred in passing to 'your high patrons.' Another detainee was questioned explicitly about 'the presence of curators from high state federal organs.' No less ominous was the warning to Mikhailov, who was told that Russkii Obraz had no future as long as it retained its name and its allegiance to Il'ya Goryachev.[190]

In the aftermath of this shock, Russkii Obraz made a conciliatory gesture to the diasporas that it had once demonised. In late July, Mikhailov represented Russkii Obraz at a kind of intercultural dialogue with youth from the Caucasus, the 'Caucasian Forum of Russian Youth' at Dombai in Karachaevo-Cherkesiya. Likened by one observer to Nashi's annual Seliger camp, the Dombai Forum was organised under the aegis of a Kremlin-approved structure, the Congress of Peoples of the Caucasus.[191] It was attended by some 200 young people from across the Russian Federation, who included two other prominent ultra-rightists, Aleksandr Bosykh and Dmitrii Demushkin. They participated in five days of round-tables, lectures, and masterclasses. Mikhailov's presence served both to distance Russkii Obraz from the neo-Nazi underground and to reclaim its position in the public arena. But it also marked a significant revision of the movement's racist ideology. A statement on Russkii Obraz's website asserted the need to cure society of 'any phobia (be it Russophobia or Caucasianophobia)' and explained that the position advanced by Mikhailov could be reduced to the slogan, 'If it is good for the Russians, it will be good for everyone.'[192] On this occasion, there was no gulf between Russkii Obraz's words and deeds. According to Bela Shakhmirzova, an ethnic Turkic Nogai who organised lectures in Moscow that were intended to challenge nationalist stereotypes, Mikhailov exhibited both kindness and an openness to Caucasian cultures:

> My new friends turned out to be Russian nationalists. This sounds very strange. For me personally it was a shock when Aleksei Mikhailov from the organisation Russkii Obraz learned to dance the lezginka [Caucasian folk dance]. This very same Aleksei Mikhailov brought me jam yesterday because I had a sore throat. This is a mental revolution.[193]

It was indeed a 'mental revolution' for the leader of an organisation that had celebrated neo-Nazi killers, proposed that ethnic minorities be denied basic rights, and appealed for a ban on Caucasians attending New Year's celebrations in Moscow. From his cell in Lefortovo pre-trial detention prison, Nikita Tikhonov made no secret of his dislike of this turn of events. Mikhailov's presence at Dombai, he lamented, was a signal that Russkii Obraz's new leadership had abandoned the organisation's struggle against ethnic diasporas.[194]

Russkii Obraz's flirtation with state-sponsored multiculturalism did not end at Dombai. In September 2011, the organisation participated in 'The Alley of Friendship,' a celebration of inter-ethnic harmony organised by the Moscow House of Nationalities. To the strains of Caucasian accordians and Greek drums, Russkii Obraz activists joined members of the Armenian, Greek, and Ingush diasporas to plant maple trees.[195] It was a striking contrast with an earlier exercise in symbolic gardening, filmed two years earlier for Russkii's Obraz's documentary *Russkoe Soprotivlenie*, in which militants secretly planted saplings in memory of neo-Nazi militants who had perished in the course of an imaginary war against racial enemies.[196]

Mikhailov's cooperation with Caucasian diasporas also marked a fundamental divergence with opposition nationalists, who had increasingly found a

common cause in denouncing federal subsidies for the corrupt republics of the North Caucasus. On 22 October, national liberals like Aleksei Naval'nyi and Vladimir Milov joined national democrats like Konstantin Krylov in a major demonstration under the slogan, 'Enough feeding the Caucasus' (*Khvatit kormit' Kavkaz*).[197] A month later, Mikhailov spoke at a forum at the Moscow House of Nationalities. The slogan 'Enough feeding the Caucasus,' he declared, was 'irresponsible in our situation.' Although not unequivocally opposed to it, he asserted that 'I do not use it.' He proceeded to exhort his listeners to embrace 'responsible nationalism.'[198]

Conclusion

As an organisation and as a brand, Russkii Obraz never recovered from the trial of Tikhonov and Khasis. Moderate nationalists were alienated by Russkii Obraz's complicity in neo-Nazi terror. Radicals were outraged by Goryachev's collaboration with the security forces. At the Russian March at Lyublino on 4 November 2011, Evgenii Valyaev and other members of Russkii Obraz avoided provoking the hostility of other marchers by parading under the banners of Pravyi Mir ('Right World').[199] As its funding dried up, as its regional branches cut ties, as its founder languished as a fugitive in Belgrade, Russkii Obraz gradually ceased to function. Its website was not renewed in late 2012 and became inaccessible in April 2013. One month later, Aleksei Mikhailov conceded publicly that 'the media reality after the end of the [Tikhonov–Khasis] trial was such that even the mention of Russkii Obraz elicited an unequivocally negative reaction.' Under such conditions, 'to work with this brand had become impossible.'[200]

The collapse of Russkii Obraz coincided with the demise of BORN. In March 2011, while the trial of Tikhonov and Khasis was in progress, the Investigative Committee indicted Aleksei Korshunov, Tikhonov's successor as the gang's leader, who had been identified by a Tadjik janitor as the murderer of Judge Chuvashov.[201] An arrest warrant was quickly approved by the Moscow City Court.[202] By then, Korshunov was in hiding in Ukraine. Seven months later the case reached a literal dead end, when Korshunov's remains – a mangled torso with swastika tattoos – were identified by police in the southeast Ukrainian city of Zaporizhia. He had evidently been killed one evening by the accidental detonation of his own hand-grenade while jogging around a local oval.[203]

There is no doubt that the scandal around Russkii Obraz had political repercussions. For the Kremlin, the revelation of its patronage of ultranationalists involved in the neo-Nazi underground was not only public relations disaster. It was also a source of friction with the security structures that constituted one of the foundations of the regime. The result was a curtailment of managed nationalism. Never again did an overtly neo-Nazi organisation enjoy the kind of official support that had propelled Russkii Obraz's meteoric ascent during 2008–9. Yet even as the security forces pulverised the neo-Nazi underground, even as the public platforms of opposition nationalism were shut down, far-right militants continued to serve in pro-Kremlin youth organisations. The supervisors of Russia's controlled political system remained attached to the idea that radical nationalists

were an ally against the menace of an anti-authoritarian 'coloured revolution' fomented by liberals and leftists.

The persistence of this idea created opportunities for Goryachev's former comrades. As the Tikhonov–Khasis case unfolded, as the FSB closed in on the remaining members of BORN, some members of Russkii Obraz reinvented themselves as 'right conservatives' and forged new connections with state institutions. Under the aegis of the Public Chamber, they took their place alongside other loyalist civil society organisations. Instead of working with shadowy intermediaries from pro-Kremlin youth organisations, they increasingly relied upon a public system of competitive grants. When pro-democracy protests erupted in December 2011, these veterans of Russkii Obraz were ideally placed to benefit from the Kremlin's second 'preventive counter-revolution,' a new programme of measures to buttress the regime against a revolutionary upheaval. Like a phoenix, a new incarnation of Russkii Obraz was about to rise from its own ashes.

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7 Right-conservatism and the second counter-revolution

> The vacuum that is emerging within the regime will be filled by those who are inclined to do so… if Russian nationalists prefer to scream at opposition rallies, that means that someone else will come to power.
>
> – Dmitrii Rogozin, deputy premier, at meeting with Russian nationalists, 4 February 2012[1]

> We must delegate the worthiest of us into state structures, help them to advance and do good in the interests of society.
>
> – Il'ya Goryachev, video declaration to the founding congress of the Right Conservative Alliance, 20 February 2012[2]

The trial of Tikhonov and Khasis inflicted irreparable damage on Russkii Obraz. Once a paragon of intellectual sophistication and daring radicalism, the organisation was now derided as Suchii Obraz ('Bitch's Image'), a synonym for cowardice and hypocrisy. This sudden infamy deprived its remaining members of much of the political capital that they had accumulated since 2008. As pariahs in nationalist ranks, they no longer had the capacity to summon crowds to pro-Kremlin demonstrations. Nor could they play the role of a credible spoiler against anti-Kremlin nationalists.

Despite their fall from grace, members of Russkii Obraz's inner circle quickly re-emerged as prominent actors in the media and civil society. This chapter shows how their return to the limelight was made possible by the Kremlin's new 'preventive counter-revolution,' a set of measures introduced to contain two successive revolutionary challenges. The first was the 'white ribbon' protest movement, which erupted in the aftermath of the December 2011 Duma elections, shaking but not toppling the regime. The second was the victorious revolution in Ukraine: the Euromaidan and ouster of President Viktor Yanukovych. Both upheavals inspired the Kremlin to re-enlist radical nationalists as proxies in the struggle against the revolutionary menace.

Like its predecessor, the second 'preventive counter-revolution' was both repressive and mobilisational.[3] In a series of political trials accompanied by a vituperative media campaign, the Kremlin struck at participants in the protest movement and the advocates of systemic change. This crackdown, which intensified in the aftermath of the Euromaidan and the annexation of Crimea,

transformed the landscape of nationalist politics. Some leading figures, such as Aleksandr Belov (Potkin) and Dmitrii Demushkin, were sentenced to substantial prison terms. Many others, like Vladimir Basmanov (Potkin) and Igor' Artemov, went into exile. At the same time, the post-2012 order offered rewards for those who came out in support of the regime. On the level of personnel, an array of nationalists moved into influential posts in the state apparatus. The most important was Dmitrii Rogozin, a veteran nationalist politician, who in December 2011 was appointed deputy premier. This position enabled him to become a credible interlocutor between the Kremlin and the nationalist milieu.

Rogozin's persuasiveness was strengthened by the Kremlin's 'conservative turn,' which revolved around three major initiatives.[4] The first was a campaign against illegal immigration, which raged between May 2012 and the autumn of 2013. Publicised by Kremlin-aligned television and legitimised by Rogozin's personal intervention, the campaign provided an opening for gangs of vigilantes to detain suspected illegals.[5] The second initiative was the protection of the feelings of religious believers, which was triggered by the Pussy Riot affair and culminated in an amendment to the criminal code that made those who insulted religious feelings liable to three years' imprisonment.[6] The third, enshrined in law at the same session of the Duma, was a ban on 'homosexual propaganda.' NGOs that publicly asserted the equal value of 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' sexual relations now faced fines of a million rubles.[7] By pandering to longstanding prejudices of Russian nationalists, the 'conservative turn' made it easier for them to collaborate with the regime.

In a variety of guises, veterans of Russkii Obraz participated in the second preventive counter-revolution. They directed Modus Agendi, a media platform and discussion forum that mirrored the activities of civic structures that had galvanised the white-ribbon protests. They dominated the Right-Conservative Alliance, an unregistered bloc of far-right intellectuals that aspired to become the crucible of a new rightist movement. They transformed Ridus, a website that had once been a platform of the white-ribbon protests, into a purveyor of loyalist propaganda and smear campaigns against opposition leaders. They served as experts for pro-Kremlin civil society organisations such as Narodnaya Diplomatiya and CIS-EMO, which operated as instruments of Russian soft power on the international stage. And they coordinated Bitva za Donbass, an organisation that rallied Russian nationalists behind the Kremlin's intervention in southeast Ukraine. Although apparently disparate, these structures were linked in a network that was based on the connections of Russkii Obraz and the broader far-right subculture.

To meet the demands of Putin's third term, these former Russkii Obraz militants jettisoned some of the most cherished tenets of their ideology. They avoided overt neo-Nazi rhetoric and distanced themselves from skinhead gangs. Indeed, several of these militants capitalised on their deep knowledge of the far-right milieu to reinvent themselves as experts on extremism. Instead of 'political soldiers' and 'partisans,' they advocated civil society as an agent of change. Instead of relying on covert funding from functionaries of loyalist youth organisations, they collaborated with established pro-Kremlin intellectuals and applied for

grants within the framework of the Public Chamber, the structure established in 2005 as a bridge between the state and civil society. On one level, this quest for state funding represented a continuation of Goryachev's work for Mitryushin. But it was more respectable because it was undertaken openly. No one could accuse the recipients of public grants of being secret beneficiaries of Kremlin largesse.

The White-ribbon protests

The new preventive counter-revolution was a reaction to the intensifying opposition and civic activism that culminated in the mass demonstrations against election fraud in the winter of 2011–12. What made this protest wave particularly ominous was the convergence of nationalists and the left-liberal opposition.[8] The symbol of this convergence was Aleksei Naval'nyi, the former Yabloko activist who had tried to cultivate liberal nationalism through the Narod movement and the 'New Political Nationalism.' Naval'nyi's rise was propelled by his success as an anti-corruption activist, but it also reflected a broader rapprochement between democrats and nationalists. One of the most important sites of this rapprochement was Eduard Limonov's Strategy-31, a series of demonstrations in Moscow's Triumphal Square in support of freedom of assembly, a core demand of both democrats and nationalists. The first move had been made in August 2009 by three prominent nationalists (Vladimir Tor, Konstantin Krylov and Natal'ya Kholmogorova) when they appeared at a public debate on Strategy-31 at Moscow's Sakharov Centre. Here they encountered not only National-Bolsheviks, but also socialists from Left Front, and liberals from Solidarnost' and Kasparov's OGF.[9] During 2010–11, these ties were strengthened by the shared experience of repression on Triumphal Square. After his arrest at the Strategy-31 demonstration on New Year's Eve 2011, Tor shared a detention cell for 15 days with Boris Nemtsov, the leader of Solidarnost'. 'We conversed normally,' reflected Nemtsov after his release. 'We might normally debate in parliament.'[10] These conversations prepared the way for the involvement of Tor and other nationalist leaders in the mass demonstrations of 2011–12.[11]

The extra-systemic opposition's strategy for the elections crystallised at the 'Antiseliger' Forum in Khimki Forest in June 2011, one month after the verdict in the Tikhonov–Khasis trial. Intended as the antithesis of the regimentation at Nashi's annual camp at Lake Seliger, Antiseliger became both a carnival and a laboratory of anti-Putin activism. Liberals, leftists, National-Bolsheviks, nationalists, and even some representatives of the systemic opposition, were in attendance. Aleksei Naval'nyi used the occasion to propose a strategy for the coming elections: vote for any party except for United Russia, 'the party of crooks and thieves.' No less important was the presence of activists from Golos, Russia's leading election-monitoring NGO, who were recruiting monitors to ensure the integrity of the elections.[12] At last the notoriously fragmented opposition had begun to unite around a common cause.

The threat posed by this development was magnified by the steady erosion of popular confidence in the regime. According to Levada Center, Putin's approval rating as premier had dropped from 38% in August 2011 to 23% in November.[13]

This decline was undoubtedly aggravated by President Medvedev's announcement at United Russia's congress in September of his decision to cede the presidency to his predecessor. Little enthusiasm was evoked by the announcement of Putin's presidential candidacy: a majority of those polled had no expectation that his return would produce positive change.[14] No less ominous was the weakening of support for the ruling party, which dropped from 60% to 51% during the first week of the election campaign.[15]

Official anxiety about popular discontent was exacerbated by the upheaval in North Africa and the Middle East. Like the 'coloured revolutions' in 2003–5, the Arab Spring served as a showcase of the mobilising power of new revolutionary technologies. In particular, the insurrections in Tunisia and Egypt dramatised the weakness of state propaganda apparatuses against the new platforms of interactive social media, such as Twitter and Facebook. One sign of apprehension in the corridors of power was the efforts of security officials and Kremlin-aligned media and to stigmatise the Arab Spring as a new instalment of Western-instigated 'coloured revolution.'[16] Another, if true, were the reports about the influence of the upheaval on high-level decision-making. According to the well-informed commentator Stanislav Belkovskii, Putin's decision to return to the presidency was prompted by the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya.[17] Certainly Putin's emotional reaction to the killing of the Libyan dictator suggests deep anxiety about the Arab revolutions.[18]

Ironically, Putin's decision to return to the presidency increased the vulnerability of the regime. It provoked clashes within the elite that eroded its cohesion and disrupted the operation of the 'managed democracy' supervised by Vladislav Surkov, the deputy head of the Presidential Administration. One of the first victims of this struggle was Gleb Pavlovskii, the political technologist who had guided the first 'preventive counter-revolution.' After calling for Putin to allow Medvedev to run for re-election, Pavlovskii was forced to resign as a Kremlin consultant in May 2011.[19] The gravity of his faux pas was underlined by the cessation of government contracts for Pavlovskii's Foundation for Effective Politics, the Kremlin's brains trust since the late 1990s.[20] Weakened by the struggle between rival centres of power, Surkov found it increasingly difficult to manage systemic politics. Less than three months before the elections, he intervened to reassert control over the Kremlin-backed liberal project Pravoe Delo ('Right Cause'). In retaliation, the party's ousted leader, the billionnaire Mikhail Prokhorov, denounced Surkov from the podium of the party congress as 'a puppet master, who has privatised the political system and long misinformed the country's leadership about what is happening.'[21] Prokhorov's unusual audacity undoubtedly reflected his awareness that the puppet master was losing his grip.

To rally support for his return to the presidency, Putin created the All-Russian Popular Front (Obshcherossiiskii Narodnyi Front, ONF), a non-party structure headed by Surkov's rival, Vyacheslav Volodin. From the outset, it was clear that one of ONF's functions was to appeal to Russian nationalists. Even in its name, ONF staked a claim to a nationalist constituency.[22] A conduit to this constituency was provided by Molodaya Gvardiya Edinoi Rossii (Young Guard of United Russia, MGER), the ruling party's youth movement, whose cadres dominated

ONF's youth wing. For several years, MGER had been a haven for radical nationalists, including Russkii Obraz's Andrei Gulyutin, who edited its website.[23] The cordial relations between MGER leaders and radical nationalists were evident at a meeting with selected bloggers held by ONF's youth wing at the headquarters of the Moscow government on 9 June 2011. Boycotted by liberals, the event was dominated by nationalists including Aleksandr Bosykh (KRO), Vladimir Militarev (ROD), and Aleksei Mikhailov (Russkii Obraz).[24] When Bosykh inquired whether ONF could serve as a framework for his own activism, a member of MGER's public council assured him that 'you, Aleksandr, can always count on the support of Molodaya Gvardiya.'[25]

The seriousness of ONF's effort to coopt nationalists was dramatised by the political resurrection of Dmitrii Rogozin, Russia's most influential nationalist politician before he had been driven out of systemic politics by the 'preventive counter-revolution.' As ambassador to NATO, he had withdrawn from the political arena and refrained from all but the most restrained gestures towards the nationalist milieu.[26] In September 2011, three days before the announcement of Putin's presidential candidacy, Rogozin held the congress of a new movement called 'Rodina – KRO' (Rodina – Congress of Russian Communities'), which combined the names of his two most successful political projects. Rogozin used the occasion to endorse Putin and ONF.[27] He also offered an elaborate justification of collaboration with the Kremlin as an opportunity to infiltrate state institutions. By supporting Putin, he argued, the nationalists of Rodina-KRO were positioning themselves for a turnover in the leadership group. 'Enough of freezing at Russian marches!' concluded Rogozin. 'It is time to move into the offices where strategic decisions about Russia's future are being made.'[28]

The sealing of ONF's pact with Rogozin coincided with a succession of setbacks for Vladislav Surkov. An attempt by NTV to discredit Golos, the election-monitoring organisation that had long been feared as a catalyst of a coloured revolution, backfired spectacularly. The most memorable footage to emerge from it was a viral video made by Golos employees of NTV's hapless film crew as it attempted to ambush Golos's deputy director, Grigorii Melkonyants, who responded 87 times to the reporter's questions with the mantra: 'You are Surkov's propaganda.'[29]

No more successful were the counter-revolutionary efforts of Surkov's brainchild, Nashi. To contain anticipated post-election protests, Nashi arranged for 15,000 recruits to travel to Moscow to attend a 'Forum for Civil Activists.'[30] For several days after election night, the visitors held loyalist rallies, which culminated on 6 December with an action 'to congratulate United Russia on its Victory.'[31] That evening, Nashi failed its first real test as a counter-revolutionary project. Attempting to drown out the chants of protesters, a detachment of Nashi activists beat drums in Moscow's Triumphal Square. The foray was a fiasco. The drummers were overwhelmed both by the size and by the vigour of the opposition crowd. According to Oleg Kashin, 'instead of a many thousand-strong crowd of loyalists and fighting guarding units, society was shown a motley crew of somewhat frightened provincial school children, banging drums within a cordon on Triumphal Square.'[32] Far from striking fear into the protesters, Nashi's conscripts proved incapable even of defending their own instruments. One drum was kicked around the square like

a football, with OMON riot police in hot pursuit.[33] Others were taken home as trophies by opposition militants.[34] The impact of this debacle was magnified by the news that some Nashi activists had actually joined opposition crowds.[35]

When an estimated 100,000 protesters marched to Bolotnaya Square on 10 December, pro-Kremlin youth organisations were nowhere to be seen. Shaken by its loss of control over public space, the regime responded with a confusing mixture of concessions and threats. On the one hand, President Medvedev used his annual address to the State Duma to announce a package of political reforms, which included the restoration of gubernatorial elections, the lowering of the threshold for the registration of political parties, and single mandate electorates for Duma elections.[36] On the other, Premier Putin vilified the protesters as pawns of US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, whose criticism of the elections had been a signal to the protest leaders.[37] This line was quickly taken up by Kremlin proxies like Sergei Kurginyan, who exhorted citizens to join him at a counter-demonstration on 24 December to confront 'the henchmen of international gangsters,' who were plotting 'the final dismemberment of the country.'[38]

What was clear, however, was that Surkov's system had broken down. On 28 December, he was effectively demoted from deputy head of the presidential administration to a technocratic cabinet position, as deputy prime-minister with responsibility of modernisation. For some observers, Surkov was an ideal scapegoat. As the architect of 'managed democracy,' he was the embodiment of the abuses that had provoked the protests. Surkov himself conceded that he had become 'too odious for the brave new world.'[39] His demise also precipated the collapse of the system of lavishly funded pro-Kremlin youth organisations, Nashi and its satellites, that had been touted as an impregnable barrier against 'coloured revolution.' The final blow was struck by the hackers of 'Anonymous,' who posted 16 gigabytes of correspondence from Nashi's press secretary Kristina Potupchik and other commissars. The resulting 'Potupchikgate' scandal exposed the exhorbitant cost of Nashi's activities. Vast sums were being expended on a network of loyalist bloggers. Even a relatively minor action, such as the drumming performance in Triumphal Square on 6 December, had cost 25 million rubles.[40] Particularly damaging was the publication of correspondence between Potupchik and Roman Verbitskii, the football gang leader who had been rescued from the police by the Presidential Administration at the height of the 'preventive counter-revolution.' Complaining about criticism of Nashi in *Kommersant"*, Potupchik suggested in February 2008 that they 'create unbearable conditions' for the newspaper: 'Block their work. Psychologically and physically crush them.' The result was a disabled by a denial-of-service (DDoS) attack that shut down the *Kommersant"* website.[41] Although the police rejected the newspaper's demand for an investigation, Nashi never recovered from the scandal.

The rise of Rogozin

The opportunities for pro-Kremlin nationalists created by Surkov's eclipse were highlighted by the elevation of Dmitrii Rogozin, who was appointed deputy premier, with responsibility for the military industrial complex, on 23 December

2011. Rogozin had little specialist expertise in his new field of responsibility, but his appointment was the beginning of a new dialogue between the Kremlin and Russian nationalists. Vladimir Pribylovskii, a leading expert on Russian nationalism, noted that 'the appointment signifies the union of Putin and nationalists, or at least with their relatively moderate part.'[42] Instead of shady curators like Mitryushin and Simunin, the Kremlin could now employ a credible nationalist politician to communicate with the patriotic milieu.

One month after Rogozin's appointment, Putin made a personal appeal to Russian nationalists. In one of a series of newspaper articles that constituted a kind of election manifesto, he made three significant concessions. First, he confirmed the special status of ethnic Russians (*russkie*) in the Russian state. They were both the 'state-forming people' and 'a bar, a fabric that holds together' Russia's 'unique civilisation.' Second, he conceded that the state had failed to defend them when their rights were trampled in their historic territories. Third, he acknowledged nationalist anxieties about ethnic outsiders: the conduct of immigrants, the scale of illegal immigration, the threat of ethnic criminality, and the rise of ethnic enclaves. Nevertheless, Putin's guiding assumptions were those of a statist defender of a cosmopolitan, multi-national empire, not those of an ethnonationalist. He warned about the danger of the 'bacillus of nationalism,' lambasted those who had abused legitimate grievances to foment civic unrest and suggested that best solution to immigration was not border controls but the use of the proposed Eurasian Union to raise living standards in Central Asia.[43] Even some anti-white ribbon nationalists were incensed by the president's deafness to their demands.[44]

In early February, Rogozin published a response that was kind of manifesto for a counter-revolutionary alliance between nationalists and the Kremlin against the protest movement. Putin's article, contended Rogozin, was not only 'unprecedented'; it was also a plea for help. Like Tsar Nicholas II in the face of the revolutionary onslaught, like Stalin in the face of Nazi invasion, a Russian leader had appealed to his people at a moment of national peril. The threat now came from the liberal 'political scoundrels' who dominated the protest movement. Echoing Kremlin propaganda, Rogozin claimed that these scoundrels both intended to pillage the country and were pawns of foreign interests. But he also vilified them within the framework of radical nationalist discourse as 'Russophobes' who resented the very word '*Russkie*' and saw the anti-extremist Article 282 of the criminal code as a safeguard against fascism. How, asked Rogozin, 'could Russian nationalists make common cause with those who hate and despise our Motherland and the Russian people?'[45]

For Rogozin, Russia's salvation lay in a historic alliance between Russian nationalists and the regime. By acknowledging Russian grievances, Putin had 'brought the Russian question out of the underground' and legitimised nationalist discourse in the public arena: 'henceforth to speak of Russian rights and problems will not be considered somehow seditious or distasteful.' Putin's gesture was proof that 'the Russian patriotic movement must boldly integrate itself into the regime and learn the management of such a complex organism as the Russian state.' To demonstrate his personal commitment to this integration, Rogozin announced his participation in a new Volunteer Movement of Putin's All-Russian

Popular Front. This new initiative was 'a national-patriotic, rightist alternative to the chaos of street demonstrations' and 'national self-defence against attempts to impose external rule on Russia.'[46]

Two days later, Rogozin took his case for collaboration to a conclave of prominent nationalist intellectuals and activists. No journalists were present, but an account of the discussion was posted by Aleksei Mikhailov on the website of Russkii Obraz. The participants, according to him, could be divided into three factions. The first, dominated by Aleksandr Prokhanov and Aleksandr Sevast'yanov, rehearsed old ideological debates about the rival claims of empire and ethnonationalism. The second, exemplified by the pro-Kremlin political technologist Mikhail Remizov, tried to focus on the current crisis and the prospects of the emerging 'Russian lobby.' The third consisted of opposition nationalists like Vladimir Tor and Aleksandr Belov, who had joined the white-ribbon protests but nevertheless struck a deferential pose towards Rogozin.[47]

In a speech that was both a rebuke and an invitation, Rogozin challenged his audience to seize a historic opportunity to make common cause with the Russian state against their enemies, the liberal leaders of the protest movement. Until now, complained Rogozin, Russian nationalists had failed to find a common language with the people. Even their core electorate, the armed forces and employees of the military industrial complex, did not perceive nationalist leaders as 'their own.' As long as these leaders represented no one but themselves, they would not be treated seriously by the regime. Now, however, they had a chance to acquire positions of influence within the state. 'The vacuum that is emerging within the regime,' he explained, 'will be filled by those who are inclined to do so.' The doors to power would be unlocked by collaboration, not by revolution. In words clearly addressed to Tor and Belov, Rogozin added that 'if Russian nationalists prefer to scream at opposition rallies, that means that someone else will come to power.'[48]

Rogozin's call for collaboration was strongly endorsed by Aleksei Mikhailov, Russkii Obraz's representative at the gathering. In his comments on Russkii Obraz's website, he declared that Rogozin's words had a special weight because they were founded on years of experience in the nationalist 'protest movement' and on a real understanding of the mechanisms of power.[49] This assessment may have reflected Mikhailov's other political attachment, his service on the presidium of Rogozin's revived party, Rodina-KRO.[50] But Mikhailov's presence at the round-table undoubtedly had important consequences for Russkii Obraz. His own speech signalled a significant revision of the organisation's ideology and praxis. On the level of ideology, he proposed conservatism as a new ideological banner. What made this challenging was the fact that Russian conservatives, unlike their Western counterparts, could not pose as defenders of institutions that had stood the test of time. Mikhailov's solution was to fabricate an ideology based upon two pillars: traditional values and Russian nationalism. On the level of praxis, he contended that Russian nationalists needed to replicate the creative atmosphere nurtured by left-liberals: the ferment that had attracted a diverse group of public activists, journalists and cultural figures to the white-ribbon protest movement.[51] Both proposals represented ruptures with Russkii Obraz's long history as a platform of a neo-Nazi ideology and a supporter of revolutionary violence.

Modus Agendi

Russkii Obraz's first step towards the creation of a 'creative atmosphere' was the launching in February 2012 of 'Modus Agendi,' a discussion club and internet portal. In format, Modus resembled the opposition-aligned website Ezhednevnyi Zhurnal (www.ej.ru), which had been an important platform and forum for the extra-systemic opposition. Edited by Aleksandr Ryklin, Ezhednevnyi Zhural' helped to expand the opposition's network by publishing not only outspoken critics of the regime but also a wider circle of liberal intellectuals, commentators, and rights-defenders. It also undertook some bold challenges to the regime, such as the 2010 petition 'Putin must go!' One tribute to the site's importance was its repeated disablement by hackers' attacks.[52] Ultimately in 2014, it became one of the first victims of the Lugovoi Law, which provided for the extra-judicial suppression of websites.[53]

Like Ezhednevnyi Zhurnal', Modus Agendi posted regular contributions from a coterie of columnists, and occasional submissions and republications from a broader milieu. The difference was that Ezhednevnyi Zhurnal's editor and regular commentators were prominent journalists, civic activists, and public figures; those of Modus Agendi were little known members of Russkii Obraz's network. Modus Agendi was edited by 'Andrei Osipov,' a pseudonym for Andrei Gulyutin, who had been a central figure in Russkii Obraz, a contributor to its journal, and a former drummer in its band, *Khuk Sprava*.[54] In his choice of regular authors, he favoured veterans of Russkii Obraz, including its leaders Il'ya Goryachev and Aleksei Mikhailov, prominent activists like Evgenii Valyaev, Mikhail Valyaev, Dmitrii Taratorin ('Gleb Borisov') and Dmitrii Steshin, and less public members like Stanislav Byshok.[55]

It was no surprise that Modus Agendi neglected to inform its readers of its link to its notorious predecessor. The only hint was encoded in the website's logo, which was a stylised version of Russkii Obraz's Constantine Cross. The content of Modus Agendi, however, returned to several of Russkii Obraz's ideological fixations. There were numerous articles, some written by Il'ya Goryachev in Belgrade, about Serbian politics and the evils of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. There was detailed coverage of anti-Muslim activism by the far-right in Europe. And there was a stream of articles by Marina Butina about the need to relax restrictions on firearm ownership.[56]

From its inception, Modus Agendi was preoccupied with the struggle against the protest movement. It regularly posted articles warning about the danger of an 'Orangist' revolutionary upheaval.[57] It also directed a torrent of vilification at the protest movement, its leaders, its methods, and its values. Most of this coverage was designed to weaken nationalist support for the protests by highlighting the gulf between left-liberals and traditional values. Modus Agendi repeatedly drew attention to the presence of LGBT militants in the protest coalition and to the 'blasphemous' performance by Pussy Riot in Christ the Saviour Cathedral.[58]

The creation of Modus Agendi was only a small part of the Kremlin's mobilisation of loyalist groups in response to the post-election protests. Although ideologically diverse, these groups were united by their radical hostility towards

liberalism and the West. On the neo-Stalinist left, there were Sergei Kurginyan's Sut' Vremeni (Essence of Time), Gennadii Semigin's Patrioty Rossii (Patriots of Russia), and Nikolai Starikov's Trade Union of Citizens of Russia. On the right flank, there were Dmitrii Rogozin's Rodina-KRO and his new Volunteer Movement. These were supplemented by an assortment of civic structures linked to the security apparatus such as the Russian Union of Afghan Veterans. On 4 February, these groups came together at Poklonnaya Gora for a massive pro-Putin rally under the slogan 'For a Great Russia.'[59] Although the crowd was largely assembled from employees of state enterprises, the list of speakers was a roll-call of extremists brought into the mainstream by the Kremlin: Prokhanov, Kurginyan, Starikov, and Narochnitskaya. This spectacle disappointed pro-Putin moderates like Boris Mezhuev, deputy editor of *Izvestiya*, who lamented that 'the authorities have handed over the entire loyalist field to anti-Western radicals.'[60]

The right-conservative alliance

Within weeks of its inception, Modus Agendi had spawned a new counter-revolutionary initiative, the 'Right-Conservative Alliance' (Pravo-Konservativnyi Al'yans, PKA). Founded at a conference at the five-star Metropol' Hotel on 20 February 2012, the PKA purported to advance a broader nationalist agenda than Russkii Obraz. In his keynote speech, Aleksei Mikhailov, still the chairman of Russkii Obraz's Political Council, sounded the alarm about the revolutionary crisis that had been triggered by the sudden thaw. In the impending struggle for power, argued Mikhailov, liberals held the advantage over nationalists because they were supported by political institutions and by an influential segment of the media. Under these conditions, it was essential to create a gravitational pole around which opponents of revolution might consolidate their forces. Conceding that ethnonationalism could not serve as this pole, Mikhailov called for an ideological widening under the banner of 'right-conservatism.' This term, he acknowledged, had been coined by Andrei Savel'ev, one of Rogozin's closest allies in the original Rodina party. Modifying his original blueprint presented at Rogozin's round-table, Mikhailov announced that this ideology would now be based upon not two but five tenets. 'Traditional values' remained, but 'Russian nationalism' was rephrased as 'national business,' and the list was supplemented with education, concern for the elderly, and healthy lifestyles. By rallying around this agenda, nationalists might be able to use the current upheaval to acquire both institutional and political power. On the one hand, nationalists could follow Rogozin's pathway into the structures of the state. On the other, the departure of Surkov gave them an opportunity to create a genuine nationalist party to popularise their ideas and compete in elections.[61]

The connection between PKA and Russkii Obraz was underlined by the appearance of Il'ya Goryachev, who addressed the conference by video link from Belgrade. Calling for the consolidation of the 'right,' Goryachev warned against the kind of 'coloured revolution' that had subjected Serbia to 'de facto foreign

occupation.' Like Mikhailov, he exhorted 'right-conservatives' to colonise the state apparatus:

> We must delegate the worthiest of us into state structures, help them to advance and do good in the interests of society. We have an example of how this can happen. Today one of the leading posts in the country is occupied by a politician who advocated rightist conservative positions during the course of his entire life. This is Dmitrii Rogozin. In the near future, there must be more people like him in the leadership of the country.[62]

If the purpose of Goryachev's speech was to encourage the consolidation of nationalist forces, it was a spectacular failure. Soon after the conclusion of the conference, one of its celebrity guests, the martial arts champion Roman Zentsov, expressed his outrage at Goryachev's return to the limelight. Zemtsov, whose Soprotivlenie ('Resistance') movement had been a close ally of Russkii Obraz in 2009–10, announced that he would not collaborate with discredited individuals like Goryachev.[63] A parallel polemic erupted on the blog of Viktor Militarev, a veteran political technologist who had been involved in DPNI and the Russian marches. After posting the text of Goryachev's speech, Militarev faced a storm of complaints from supporters of Tikhonov and Khasis. Challenged to say whether he would shake Goryachev's hand, Militarev replied that his answer depended on whether Tikhonov was guilty. It was far from an unequivocal endorsement.[64]

The controversy surrounding Russkii Obraz also undermined PKA's efforts to support Rogozin's 'Volunteer Movement of the All-Russian Popular Front in Defence of the Army and Fleet' (DON). The founding congress of DON, which was scheduled to take place one week after that of PKA, was intended as a kind of patriotic rally against the revolutionary menace. In early February, Evgenii Valyaev had announced that Russkii Obraz would participate in the congress. DON, he claimed, was more relevant than pro-Kremlin youth organisations like Nashi and 'responsive to the demands of civil society.'[65] This offer, from a leader of a tarnished organisation, quickly brought unwelcome publicity. In mid-February, the newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* published a purported expose of DON's links to Russkii Obraz. The author, Aleksandra Samarina, alleged that Aleksei Mikhailov was playing a major role in the preparations for DON's congress and might even serve as its chairman. To underline his sinister background, she provided quotations from Russkii Obraz's 2009 programme about the denial of basic rights to ethnic minorities and the threat of genetic degradation posed by racial mixing.[66] On the website of Modus Agendi, Mikhailov retaliated with a polemic against this liberal 'shark of the pen,' whom he accused of attempting to discredit Rogozin and DON by linking them to Russkii Obraz and hence to fascism and terrorism. Although Mikhailov did not deny that PKA would participate in the congress, he insisted that its contingent of 20 activists would represent a tiny fraction of the thousands of delegates expected at the event.[67] This disavowal was confirmed by the proceedings at the Krokus-City

convention centre on 26 February, which were dominated by Patriarch Kirill, who denounced the 'information warfare' being waged against Russia, and by Rogozin, who scorned the protesters' white ribbons as 'the flag of surrender.' Mikhailov and his friends from PKA were inconspicuous in a crowd of 3,704 delegates and 422 guests.[68]

By then, the PKA had found a cause célèbre to draw attention to its struggle against the protest movement. On the morning of 21 February, three young women from the feminist punk band Pussy Riot entered Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow. Masked in their trademark coloured balaclavas, they approached the altar, in front of which they jumped up and down while waving their fists in the air. Within a minute they were driven out of the premises by security staff. Later that evening, video footage of their intrusion was posted on the group's internet site as part of a music video, a 'punk prayer' exhorting the Virgin Mary to drive Putin from the Kremlin.[69] This transgression of ecclesiastical territory became an instant scandal. It also provoked a heated debate. Some supporters of the protest movement resented the way that Pussy Riot had diverted attention from the anti-Putin campaign.[70] Even the Orthodox Church was divided: prominent clerics like Andrei Kuraev advocated mercy while others like Vsevolod Chaplin, Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Synodal Department for Cooperation between Church and Society, demanded vengeance.[71]

The standard-bearers of the campaign against Pussy Riot, however, were pro-Kremlin conservatives and nationalists, who used the incident to tar the entire protest movement with the brush of blasphemy. Maksim Shevchenko, the journalist and broadcaster, claimed that Pussy Riot's act of sacrilege, coupled with the 'almost universal support' from the white-ribbon protesters, amounted to 'an open declaration of war on all the peoples of our country, their faith, and their attitude to life and death.'[72] Sometimes the vilification verged on incitement to violence. Egor Kholmogorov, the influential Russian nationalist blogger, declared that if he had been one of the church wardens, he 'would have stripped [the intruders] to their underwear, rolled them in honey and fluff, shaven them bald, and driven them out into the frost before the assembled television cameras.'[73] Others took matters into their own hands. When protesters masked in Pussy Riot-style balaclavas picketed the court that was hearing an appeal on the case, they were attacked by a group of self-styled 'Russian nationalists,' who ripped down their banners and tore off their balaclavas. Taisiya Krugovykh, a young filmmaker, was punched three times in the face by Aleksandr Bosykh, a KRO militant close to Russkii Obraz.[74]

For some time after the punk prayer, the identity of the performers remained a secret. Their names were disclosed by members of Russkii Obraz, who had long specialised in gathering personal information about their adversaries. On 22 February, one day after the performance, Evgenii Valyaev published a denunciation of Pussy Riot on the website of Modus Agendi. His purpose was evident in his title: '"Pussy Riot" has demonstrated the level of moral development and immaturity of the protest movement.' For Valyaev, the 'base and immoral act' in the cathedral epitomised the protest movement, which had become a screen for 'gay parades' and an assault on traditional values. Faced with the 'baccanalia'

of a protest movement that was degenerating into a kind of pornography, the Russian majority had no choice but 'to dissociate itself once and for all' from the agitation.[75]

There was nothing original about Valyaev's fulminations. What drew attention to his article was the fact that it was headed by photographs of unmasked members of Pussy Riot, including two performers of the 'punk prayer' – Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alekhina – and it concluded with a list of their names.[76] This information was quickly supplemented by an anonymous blogger, 'colahost,' who added private addresses to the names revealed by Valyaev. There were immediate suspicions that the blog was a front for Valyaev's group. What was certain was that 'colahost' came from the neo-Nazi milieu. The blogger's list of 'interests' included 'bombing Israel, concentration camps, Nazism, ovens, death, fascism, [and] the holocaust.'[77]

The disclosures also raised questions about Valyaev's connections to the security apparatus. Grigorii Okhotin, a human rights activist at OVD-Info, pointed out that Valyaev's list included several women who had not participated in the 'Punk Prayer' but had been arrested after the group's previous foray, the concert on Red Square on 20 January. Each of them had been taken to the Kitai-Gorod police station, where they were charged with violating regulations on the conduct of public demonstrations. Responding to Okhotin's accusations, Valyaev claimed that the information had been obtained from the website of the court where they had been charged.[78] This failed to explain how Valyaev had obtained the photographs that accompanied the article. Three years later, *New Times* would shed more light on Valyaev's information gathering techniques by publishing an interview with the neo-Nazi militant Roman Zheleznov ('Zukhel'). According to Zheleznov, Valyaev made a habit of visiting police stations where detained antifa activists were being processed.[79] Partial corroboration came from an antifa militant, who noted that photographs taken of detainees at police stations quickly found their way onto neo-Nazi sites.[80]

It remains unclear whether Valyaev's unmasking of Pussy Riot was undertaken on his own initiative or at the prompting of a Kremlin curator or elements in the security apparatus. What is certain is that the resulting publicity was a triumph for Russkii Obraz's new 'right-conservative' project. It served to connect PKA to the storm of controversy raging in the nationalist blogosphere about Pussy Riot's audacious stunt. From 'colahost's' blog, Valyaev's article proliferated around the nationalist blogosphere.[81] One measure of its resonance was a series of efforts to suppress it. Valyaev's post on his Livejournal blog was blocked at the request of one of the girls he had named. At about the same time, Modus Agendi's website was disabled by a DDoS attack.[82] It was a fruitless endeavour. Within days, Valyaev's list of names had been republished in mainstream newspapers like *Izvestiya*.[83]

Tolokonnikova and Alekhina were arrested on 3 March, the eve of the presidential elections. Ten days had elapsed since Valyaev's publication. Another member of the group, Ekaterina Samutsevich, was arrested on 16 March. The case against them became an integral part of the regime's 'conservative turn,' which projected Putin as a defender of traditional values against the liberal elites and sexual minorities that had rallied behind the protest movement.

Suspicions about Modus Agendi's links to the security apparatus were heightened by its next attack on the protest movement. On the evening 17 April, officers of the anti-extremism Tsentr 'E' arrested Aleksei Sutuga ('Sokrat'), an antifa militant who enjoyed a reputation as a successor to the leaders killed by BORN.[84] At 3 am the next morning, Modus Agendi justified the arrest with a 2,000-word report titled 'The fighting wing of antifa has been decapitated.'[85] Its central contention was that Sutuga was part of a subversive movement that linked violent street militants, leftist journalists, and opposition politicians like Oleg Shein and Il'ya Ponomarev. What made this movement possible was the support of 'an array of reckless politicians from the so-called liberal camp, which needs an "infantry".'[86] The report appeared under the byline of 'Sergei Inozemtsev,' an 'expert of the Expert Council on Radical Movements of the Public Chamber.'[87] Behind this fictitious representative of a fictitious structure, however, lay the Kremlin-funded research and the anti-Orangist conspiracy theories developed by Goryachev and his circle during Russkii Obraz's struggle with the antifa movement. For some rights-defenders, the report shed important light on Tsentr 'E's crackdown on the protest movement.[88] A planning document found on Goryachev's own computer confirms that he regarded the arrest of Sutuga as a major coup for Modus Agendi, which was becoming 'a serious challenge to the left-liberal media.'[89]

Other acts of information warfare are difficult to document. According to *Novaya Gazeta*, former members of Russkii Obraz were behind a bizarre effort to discredit the banker and media magnate Aleksandr Lebedev, an outspoken supporter of the protest movement. At the Russian March in Lyublino on 4 November 2012, a group of about 15 militants held placards emblazoned with the slogan, 'Lebedev – our mayor.' The apparent intention was to smear Lebedev as a supporter of ultra-nationalists. According to an investigation conducted by *Novaya Gazeta*, 'so far as is known to us, once again taxpayers' money is flowing into Russkii Obraz for specific projects.' One of those projects was counteracting the 'liberal threat' and 'media manipulation of society.' What remained was used to fund the bizarre spectacle at Lyublino.[90] There is no doubt that Lebedev was an attractive target. He had earned the enmity of the Kremlin because of his support for Naval'nyi and the protest movement.[91] He was also an old enemy of Russkii Obraz because of his ownership of *Novaya Gazeta*, the newspaper that had worked closely with the police to solve the murder of Baburova and Markelov.[92]

What is clear is that Modus Agendi was a major platform for far-right militants during 2012–13. On the one hand, it posted a steady stream of articles and news aimed at a far-right readership. The topics ranged from rightist rock to illegal immigration, the Russian march, the threat posed by the radical left, and the history of the SS.[93] On the other, the organisation hosted 'MODUS Klub,' an 'expert political club of conservatives' who met behind closed doors 'to evaluate political-technological and ideological productions.'[94] This constant activity contrasted with the suspension of the Right Conservative Alliance, whose political prospects evaporated as a result of the Kremlin's post-Bolotnaya crackdown. The new order left little room for political contest, but it created many opportunities for pro-Kremlin think tanks and propaganda.

Ridus

The greatest contribution of Russkii Obraz's inner circle to the Kremlin's post-Bolotnaya information war was the colonisation of the website Ridus, which had become an important platform of the protest movement. The brainchild of the prominent photojournalist Il'ya Varlamov, Ridus was unveiled in September 2011 as a 'club of citizen journalism' that would enlist prominent bloggers to shape the news alongside professional journalists.[95] It soared to prominence during the post-election mass protests. Using a camera attached to a drone helicopter, it took photographs of the historic demonstration on Bolotnaya Square on 10 December 2011. Those images attracted over a million hits on Ridus' website. By the end of the month, the site was ranked by Medialogiya, an authoritative media monitoring organisation, as the tenth most cited internet resource in Russia.[96]

From its inception, Ridus was dogged by rumours that it was a Kremlin project. The announcement of its launching appeared on the site of the 'Tribune of the Public Chamber' (TOP), which emphasised that the new agency was a 'partner of TOP.'[97] TOP's website was located on the domain of the Public Chamber, and its editors were reportedly subordinate to the presidential administration.[98] Suspicions were aggravated by Ridus' detailed coverage of propaganda actions by pro-Kremlin youth groups, which were frequently ignored by journalists concerned about their independence. Ridus paid particular attention to installations by the art-group 'Monolog-TV,' which specialised in the derision of figures, like Moscow mayor Yurii Luzhkov and oligarch Mikhail Prokhorov, who had fallen out of favour in the Kremlin.[99] The reasons for this focus became clearer in February 2012, when Ridus' relationship to the Kremlin's youth apparatus was confirmed by the Potupchikgate revelations. The leaked emails included an exchange between Varlamov and Potupchik about how best to promote Ridus. In particular, Varlamov advised against aggressive advertising 'so that readers don't suspect anything.'[100] The scandal was fuelled by Vasilii Yakemenko, the creator of Nashi and the former head of Rosmolodezh', who acknowledged in a television interview that he had funded Ridus. Asked why he should squander money on people who were unaware of the identity of their benefactor, Yakemenko claimed that his aim was to establish a relationship of dependency:

> A person should first get accustomed to receiving money. He simply becomes used to it. Then he becomes indifferent to whom he takes it from. And then you go to him and say: 'Do you need money? A lot more money?'[101]

Later that year, Varlamov announced his departure from Ridus. One of the main reasons, he explained, was that he had been unable to be honest about his work on the project and its financing by KamAZ, the state-controlled truck manufacturer.[102]

The new deputy editor was Andrei Gulyutin ('Most'), a figure who exemplified the overlap between pro-Kremlin structures and the neo-Nazi milieu. Gulyutin was a veteran of Russkii Obraz. Not only had he contributed to *Russkii Obraz* journal, but he was drummer in the movement's band, *Khuk Sprava*. He had

edited the websites of both Molodaya Gvardiya, the youth movement of the ruling party, and of Modus Agendi.[103] His appointment was greeted with consternation by Varlamov, who quipped that 'one more letter "S" should be added to [Ridus'] name,' a reference to Gulyutin's time in an organisation that had consciously adopted the motto of Hitler's SS. Unsurprisingly, Gulyutin's elevation elicited applause from fellow rightists like the journalist Dmitrii Steshin, another Russkii Obraz insider, who attributed liberal outrage to the loss of a lucrative feeding trough. Under Gulyutin's guidance, exulted Steshin, Ridus would no longer have space for gay parades, sacrilegious artists, and 'white-ribbon liberal shit.'[104] A similar point was made by *Zavtra*, Aleksandr Prokhanov's far-right broadsheet, which welcomed Gulyutin's appointment as a signal that 'the monopoly of the liberal "landlords of discourse" is coming to an end.'[105]

The new editorial team promptly put an end to Varlamov's experiment in 'citizen journalism.' In April 2013, an employee of Ridus told the online newsapaper Lenta.ru that 'when Gulyutin came to the editorial board, it became obvious to everyone what to expect.' The new editors had 'openly declared a new direction of editorial policy – Russian Orthodox and statist.' Another former employee added that staff had been warned that 'the tone of the news must change completely – we are now a Kremlin resource.' About Putin, 'one can write either good things or nothing.' Ridus may have made its reputation for its coverage of the anti-Putin protest movement of 2011–12, but now there were to be 'no photographs of any kind at demonstrations where there will be bad placards about Putin.'[106] But Gulyutin may have not have entirely ignored the protests. According to antifa militants, he was seen advising agents of Tsentr-E during the anti-Putin 'March of Millions' in September 2012 and an antifa demonstration two months later.[107]

Ridus' reorientation was exemplified by its smear campaign against Aleksei Naval'nyi during his campaign for mayor of Moscow in the summer of 2013. The website produced a stream of reports impugning Naval'nyi's character. Likening him to the fanatical revolutionary villain of Dostoevskii's *The Possessed*, Ridus accused Naval'nyi of callous indifference to the fate of comrades and young supporters who had been imprisoned because of his quest for power.[108] It also circulated 'Black PR,' usually scurrilous allegations originating from pro-Kremlin bloggers. Without a shred of evidence, it insinuated that Naval'nyi or his wife were involved in extra-marital affairs.[109] It promoted unfounded tales about undisclosed business interests in the Balkans.[110] It even found space to report on the claim that he had lied about his support for the popular football team Spartak.[111] Ridus also vilified Naval'nyi's campaign staff. One aide, Maksim Kats, was 'an eccentric adventurer,' a 'saboteur' and shameless self-promoter; another, Anna Veduta, had 'tarnished the reputation of her boss' by spitting at a security guard who had manhandled her.[112] In a gesture to its far-right readers, Ridus also featured the opinions of German Sterligov, the Russian Orthodox businessman who had hosted Russkii Obraz's infamous paramilitary camp in 2009. Sterligov likened Naval'nyi to Leon Trotsky and exhorted his compatriots to save the country from civil war 'by the physical extermination of armed provocateurs – to crush the new trotsky [sic] in the bud.'[113]

Gulyutin's takeover of Ridus coincided with the high-water mark of the post-Bolotnaya collaboration of Russian ethnonationalists and the Kremlin. Since Putin's inauguration, state officials and Kremlin-aligned television had waged an increasingly virulent and racist campaign against non-Slavic illegal immigrants.[114] In public discussion, Duma deputies toyed with the idea of enlisting local vigilantes in the struggle against immigrant criminality.[115] The effect was to legitimise a new wave of xenophobic violence by 'hunters' for illegal immigrants. Indeed, on some occasions, Kremlin-aligned television journalists cooperated with these vigilantes.[116] The standard bearer of the 'hunters' was the organisation Shchit Moskvy (Shield of Moscow), which was headed by Aleksei Khudyakov, a football gang member and former member of the pro-Kremlin youth organisation, RuMol.[117] During 2013, Shchit Moskvy staged a series of violent raids on immigrant hostels, demanding identity documents and terrorising their targets. On one occasion, its vigilantes marched a parade of detained immigrant labourers to the local police station.[118] On another, the inhabitants of a hostel, under the impression that they were being attacked by skinheads, fought back.[119]

High-level support for the campaign was confirmed by a televised raid on the Dushanbe–Moscow train by vice-premier Dmitrii Rogozin, the veteran nationalist, and Vladimir Mochalov, the deputy head of the FSB's border control service. After inspecting dilapidated and overcrowded carriages, Rogozin declared on camera that the train was 'a grave threat to the sanitary health of the entire nation.'[120] Underlying his avowed concern with hygiene was a coded racist message. The wording clearly echoed Rogozin's performance in a notorious campaign advertisement for the Moscow Duma elections eight years earlier, when he had vowed to get rid of Moscow's rubbish. Unlike in 2005, Rogozin's new incitement elicited no judicial response. What brought an end to the post-Bolotnaya anti-immigrant campaign was the outbreak in October 2013 of race riots in Biryulevo region in the south of Moscow. Virtually overnight, the Kremlin-aligned media abandoned its inflammatory coverage of the subject.[121]

Ridus and Modus were the principal vehicles of Russkii Obraz's surreptitious resurgence, but they were not the only ones. The surviving Kremlin-aligned youth organisations continued to serve as an interface between the political establishment and radical nationalists. When Aleksandr Litoi, an antifa activist and journalist, reported for *RBK* on the congress of Molodaya Gvardiya, the ruling party's youth wing, in Lipetsk in 2013, he was astonished by the visibility of Andrei Gulyutin and other members of Russkii Obraz. For many years, Litoi had succeeded in preventing his photograph falling into neo-Nazi hands. At the Lipetsk congress, however, he was captured interviewing the head of the Central Electoral Commission, Vladimir Churov. The image (minus Churov) soon appeared on neo-Nazi websites.[122]

In defiance of every prediction, a coterie of Goryachev's closest associates had recovered from the disaster of the Tikhonov–Khasis case. Boosted by a new 'preventive counter-revolution' and by the rise of Dmitrii Rogozin, they had created a network of successor organisations and forged new relationships

with the authorities. As information warriors, as public commentators, and as standard-bearers of loyalist right-conservativism, they had proved useful to the regime. In return, they had been rewarded with funding and access to important platforms of the controlled public sphere. For the veterans of Russkii Obraz and their Kremlin sponsors, the only cloud on the horizon was the continuing investigation of the BORN case.

The hunt for Goryachev

For two years, Goryachev appeared to flourish in his Balkan exile. He was a regular contributor to Modus Agendi's website. He was a leading member of the Right-Conservative Alliance. He undertook consulting work for Russian government structures that paid him about a thousand dollars a month.[123] He developed relations with European far-right politicians. He even conducted a long interview with Richard Royal, the British public-relations consultant who had created 'Conservative Friends of Russia' (CFR), a controversial lobbying group of Conservative Party MPs. Published both on CRF and Modus Agendi's websites, the interview offered no surprises, but Goryachev's concluding question, about Britain's experience with terrorism in Northern Ireland, was a reminder of his longstanding obsession with the IRA.[124]

Despite his tireless activity, Goryachev's position was precarious. Already in 2012, FSB officers were speaking privately about their determination to bring him to justice.[125] While the country was transfixed by the protest movement and Putin's return to the presidency, Major General Igor' Krasnov of the Investigative Committee was slowly assembling a case about Goryachev's links to BORN. One breakthrough was the capture in 2011 of Yurii Tikhomirov, a member of BORN's 'Northern Group,' who at Tikhonov's prompting had killed the antifa militant Il'ya Dzhaparidze in July 2009. Originally Tikhomirov was to face a jury trial on murder charges, but the case was sent back to the prosecutor's office. To ensure a guilty verdict, it was downgraded to 'intentional infliction of bodily harm causing death' and heard by a judge in a closed court. In April 2012, Tikhomirov was found guilty and sentenced to ten years imprisonment.[126]

A more serious blow to Goryachev's position came in February 2012, when Evgeniya Khasis began to testify about his links to BORN and to the Kremlin. Under questioning by Krasnov, Khasis recounted a series of meetings with Tikhonov at which Goryachev had shaped the development of BORN. Not only had Goryachev offered advice about propaganda, but he had made suggestions about targets and provided Tikhonov with their addresses. The cumulative effect of Khasis's revelations was to lay the foundations of a case against Goryachev as the mastermind of BORN. She also offered a sweeping denunciation of 'managed nationalism' and Goryachev's curators in the Presidential Administration. She spoke at length about Leonid Simunin, and also implicated Vasilii Yakemenko and Vladislav Surkov. Claiming to be motivated by a wish to stop BORN's killing spree, Khasis expressed the hope that 'people in power will stop financing such structures.'[127]

Soon afterwards, Krasnov broke the resistance of Nikita Tikhonov. For several months, Tikhonov had been under intense pressure in Polyarnaya Sova ('Polar

Owl'), a labour camp situated in the Arctic limits of Siberia. According to a statement by his father, Tikhonov was confined in a tiny unventilated cell, with a lavatory pan next to his bed.[128] In return for testimony, Tikhonov was brought back to Moscow's Lefortovo prison. On 18 May 2012, he offered a detailed confession to Krasnov, recounting his involvement in OB-88, his collaboration with Goryachev in BORN, and his participation in the murders of Filatov and Markelov. Although the confession remained secret until the BORN trial, Tikhonov's rejection of the services of Russkii Verdikt's lawyer, Aleksandr Vasil'ev, signalled to his supporters that he was collaborating with the investigation.[129] Nataliya Kholmogorova lamented that 'it is terrible to know that this extraordinary, strong, wilfull person did not merely fall on the millstone but was pulverised by it so quickly.'[130]

A few weeks later, the FSB tracked two members of BORN's 'Northern Group,' Maksim Baklagin and Vyacheslav Isaev, to a rented apartment in the town of Aleksandrov in Vladimir region. Both put up armed resistance before surrendering. According to an FSB press-release, their hideout contained a small arsenal of weapons, including a Finnish submachine gun, a Makarov pistol, and a hand grenade.[131] The detainees were accused of involvement in the murders of Judge Chuvashov and the antifa militant Il'ya Dzhaparidze, but it was clear that a larger case was in preparation. *Novaya Gazeta*, which had cooperated closely with Krasnov's team, reported that the full range of crimes attributed to BORN were at issue.[132]

Goryachev's Balkan idyll was coming to an end. On 21 February 2013, the Investigative Committee opened a criminal case against him on charges that included murder, organisation of an extremist community and a gang, and illegal weapons trafficking.[133] On 8 May, Goryachev was arrested at Belgrade airport on an Interpol arrest warrant.[134] On the same day, Mikhail Volkov, one of the last BORN fighters still at liberty, was detained in Ukraine. A statement by the Investigative Committee indicated that both faced charges relating to BORN and nine murders.[135] What followed was a protracted legal struggle to prevent Goryachev's extradition. Ironically, he was represented by Mark Feigin and Igor' Polozov, two lawyers best known for defending members of Pussy Riot who had been exposed and vilified by Goryachev's friends in Modus Agendi.

Goryachev's arrest took place on the same day as Vladislav Surkov's dismissal as deputy premier, a coincidence that drew new attention to the problems of 'managed nationalism.' Some speculated that Goryachev had become a weapon in a power struggle between 'Kremlin towers,' between the siloviki and Surkov's team of political technologists. In an interview with Radio Liberty, the political analyst Vladimir Pribylovskii argued that Goryachev's arrest was 'an intrigue against Surkov.' Fond of playing on several chessboards, Surkov had made use of every available piece – leftists, liberals, fascists, nationalists and communists – 'but not without mistakes.' One of those mistakes was Goryachev, who was now being used to undermine the great manipulator.[136] Support for this interpretation came from an anonymous source in the Presidential Administration, who told the internet magazine *Slon* that:

> [Goryachev] is a nobody. This is all being gathered on Surkov… Even if [Goryachev] says nothing, all the same this will look like a horror story

> against Surkov. It might not become a criminal case, but it will certainly become a kind of media story, in which the siloviki put Surkov in this negative context.[137]

In a volume compiled in Belgrade prison, Goryachev himself claimed that the case against him was part of an internal power struggle, 'a lever for pressure by one elite group against another.' This struggle pitted the FSB's Directorate for the Protection of the Constitutional System, a relic of Soviet totalitarianism, against Surkov, who had 'laid the foundations of civil society' and 'unwittingly engendered the current mainstream fashion for protest.'[138]

In fact, a direct connection between the dates of Goryachev's arrest and Surkov's departure was unlikely. The extradition process had been launched over a month before the Kremlin reshuffle.[139] What connects the two events is the failure of Surkov's model of 'preventive counter-revolution,' with its plethora of Kremlin-sponsored youth organisations. Instead of dispersing the post-election protests, Surkov's proxies had melted into air. They were worse than powerless; they were a liability. At best, Surkov was guilty of incompetence that had endangered the regime; at worst, he was an accomplice of the protesters. Awareness that Surkov was in disgrace certainly made it easier for the Investigative Committee to prosecute Goryachev. No longer was Surkov's name a deterrent to action against the beneficiaries of managed nationalism.

The Euromaidan and the nationalist schism

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine that erupted in 2014 marked both a continuation of 'managed nationalism' and a new stage in its development. The Ukrainian revolution of 2013–14 was a source of inspiration for many anti-Kremlin activists, including Russian nationalists who dreamed of an 'Orangist' uprising against the Putin regime. To contain this challenge, the Kremlin embraced nationalist slogans and fulfilled longstanding nationalist demands. It also mobilised nationalists as proxies to launch the 'Russian Spring,' the invasion first of Crimea and then of southeast Ukraine. These initiatives marked the extension to the international stage of earlier strategies for mobilising loyalist nationalists against revolutionary opponents.

To a superficial observer, the 'Russian Spring' marked a triumph for Russian nationalists. At the highest levels of the Russian state, officials echoed nationalist slogans and appeared ready to implement demands that had once appeared unthinkable. This turn was reinforced by the invective of a phalanx of nationalist intellectuals, who whipped up patriotic fervour and moulded public perceptions of the crisis. In the course of two months, they constructed an image of the 'liberal-fascist' enemy, celebrated the invasion of Crimea as an authentic national uprising, and fostered jingoistic euphoria about the restoration of Russian power. Never before had Russian nationalists played such a central role in public debate.

Paradoxically, this ascendancy coincided with turmoil in the ranks of Russia's nationalist movement. According to Egor Kholmogorov, a leading exponent of pro-Kremlin nationalism:

> One of the unexpected and paradoxical results of the Kiev Maidan was an acute crisis in the ranks of Russian nationalists in Russia. A movement, which was recently united by the Russian marches, by support for the Biryulevo protests, by vehement criticism of the Russian Federation's immigration policy, became polarised by an argument for or against revolution in Ukraine, for or against "Right Sector."[140]

As this schism unfolded, several nationalist organisations were riven by internal conflict. Old friendships broke down and alliances were ruptured.[141] On at least one occasion, a regional nationalist leader was seriously injured by assailants who accused him of pro-Ukrainian sympathies.[142]

The conflict amongst Russian ultra-rightists was particularly acute. On the one hand, there was a large group of militants who sympathised with the Euromaidan. As advocates of armed struggle, these militants admired the fearlessness and martial prowess of the insurgents confronting state terror on the streets of Kiev. As biological racists and white supremacists, they were less susceptible than mainstream nationalists to the claims of ethnicity or geopolitics. Ideological affinities were reinforced by personal ties. Some Russian ultra-rightists had established contact with their Ukrainian counterparts through international ultra-rightist networks. Others knew Ukraine as a sanctuary from the Russian security forces.

The most important ultra-rightist organisation to come out in support of the Euromaidan was Russkie ('Russians'), the 'ethnopolitical association' headed by Aleksandr Belov and Dmitrii Demushkin. In early February 2014, Russkie demonstrated its interest in the uprising by dispatching to Kiev a three-man delegation of St. Petersburg nationalists and an affiliated media team. The delegation included Dmitrii Bobrov ('Shul'ts'), a neo-Nazi militant who had served six years in prison for his leadership of the skinhead gang Shul'ts-88.[143] His itinerary in Kiev included meetings with fighters at the barricades and consultations with Ukrainian far-right politicians.[144] Bobrov was clearly impressed by what he saw. He told *Izvestiya* that he had carefully observed the organisation of protest actions and 'decided to imitate the experience of his more "successful" colleagues' in Kiev.' After his return to St. Petersburg, he presented a 'seminar' on the subject to his comrades in the neo-Nazi formation, Natsional-Sotsialisticheskaya Initsiativa ('National Socialist Initiative').[145]

Russkii Obraz's milieu was not immune to the lure of the Euromaidan. One of the most outspoken supporters of the uprising was Aleksei Baranovskii, the coordinator of Russkii Obraz's subsidiary rights-defence project, Russkii Verdikt. In 2013–14, Baranovskii covered the Euromaidan as a stringer in Kiev for the Russian newspaper *Kommersant"*. His articles were suffused with admiration for the ultranationalist fighters of Pravyi Sektor ('Right Sector') whom he had encountered at the barricades. For Baranovskii, these fighters were nothing less than the revolution's 'spark,' and he lamented that their Russian counterparts, a possible allusion to Khasis and Tikhonov, were serving double-digit prison terms. He also paid tribute to the members of Svoboda ('Freedom'), the Ukrainian nationalist party, whose self-sacrificial courage he contrasted with the self-promotion and mercenary habits of the publicists who dominated the nationalist segment of Russia's protest movement.[146]

Two other denizens of the underworld around Russkii Obraz appear to have taken up arms for the Ukrainian cause. In June 2014, Roman Zheleznov (Zukhel'), the neo-Nazi activist who shared information about antifa militants with Il'ya Goryachev, enlisted in the Azov Battalion, a volunteer force commanded by the Ukrainian national-socialist, Andriy Biletsky. Formally integrated into the Ukrainian National Guard, the Azov Battalion was notorious for its use of torture. Zheleznev was the most prominent of an estimated 50 Russian militants who fought in its ranks.[147] In September 2014, he explained his new loyalties in an interview with Ukrainian television. Rejecting the label of Russian citizen ('Rossiyanin'), he boasted that he was an ethnic Russian who intended to 'live in Ukraine and fight for a fraternal Slavic nation.'[148] One month later, he was indicted as a mercenary by Russia's Investigative Committee.[149] According to numerous reports, his comrades in arms included Aleksandr Parinov ('Rumyn'), the last known member of BORN at liberty.[150]

On the other side of the battlelines, veterans of Russkii Obraz played a conspicuous role in the Kremlin-backed separatist forces. One of the DNR's most prominent field commanders was Aleksandr Matyushin (also known as 'Varyag' and 'Aleksandr de Krog'), a former skinhead and the leader of Russkii Obraz's local branch – 'Russkii Obraz Donbassa.'[151] Matyushin's convergence with Russkii Obraz followed the outlawing of Donetskaya Respublika, a Russian nationalist groupuscule established as an anti-Orangist platform in 2005. He clearly shared Il'ya Goryachev's ideas about the compatibility of armed struggle and lawful political campaigning. In 2013, Matyushin established 'Varyag Crew,' which he described as a 'fighting wing' composed of militants from Donetskaya Respublika.[152] At the head of a column of these militants, Matyushin led the first attempt to storm the local government headquarters in Donetsk on 1 March 2014. Varyag Crew participated in each of the subsequent skirmishes around the complex, which culminated in its seizure on 6 April.[153] Soon after the unleashing of Ukraine's 'Anti-Terrorist Operation,' Matyushin created his own, eponymous paramilitary unit, Varyag. According to him, the unit participated in the bloody struggle over Donetsk airport, escorted convoys of 'humanitarian aid,' conducted reconnaissance operations behind enemy lines, and hunted saboteurs on the home front.[154] This battle experience earned Matyushin a prominent position in the DNR military leadership. In September 2014, his name appeared alongside such leading field commanders as Igor' Bezler and Aleksandr Khodakovskii on a petition calling for the creation of a united army of Novorossiya.[155] Two months later, Matyushin was wounded by shrapnel. During his recuperation, he used an interview with Modus Agendi to acknowledge publicly his debt to Russkii Obraz. He credited Il'ya Goryachev, who was then awaiting trial on murder charges, with contributing to the creation of the separatist republics. According to Matyushin, Goryachev was 'a man who profoundly influenced the formation of my world view and whom I consider a friend.'[156]

Another figure in Russkii Obraz who became a separatist combatant was Egor Gorshkov, the movement's security director. A former firebrand of Eduard Limonov's NBP, Gorshkov had been one of Russkii Obraz's most vehement proponents of armed struggle. In 2009, he had provided knife-fighting lessons

to Nikita Tikhonov, who soon began to suspect that his trainer was a provocateur from the security agencies. After avoiding testimony during the Tikhonov trial, Gorshkov re-emerged as a member of Sergei Kurginyan's Sut' Vremeni ('The Essence of Time'), a pro-Kremlin movement known for its Soviet nostalgia and cult-like performances. In July 2014, Gorshkov played a conspicuous role in Sut' Vremeni's visit to Donetsk. Wielding a semi-automatic weapon, Gorshkov was filmed as he escorted Kurginyan to a meeting with Pavel Gubarev, the ultra-nationalist militant who had become self-styled 'People's Governor' of Donetsk and a hero of the Russian nationalist blogosphere. Instead of the expected gesture of solidarity, the encounter quickly degenerated into an acrimonious clash.[157] But Gorshkov's visit to the conflict zone was clearly a step to taking up arms. By 2016, he was serving as deputy commander of the Han detachment, a self-styled special forces unit in Donetsk.[158]

The connection between 'managed nationalism' and the conflagration in Ukraine was exemplified by the presence of several of Russkii Obraz's official curators in the two Kremlin-backed 'people's republics.' In light of Vladislav Surkov's role in the management of these nascent polities, some commentators have suggested that he dispatched trusted members of his team to implement his decisions on the ground.[159] What is clear is that some of the mechanisms of 'managed nationalism' were transferred from domestic politics to the fledgling republics. In the Donbass, as in Moscow five years earlier, Kremlin curators supervised nationalist militants to achieve a political goal. The most prominent veteran of Surkov's team to participate in the 'Russian Spring' was Pavel Karpov, the Kremlin functionary who had worked closely with Russkii Obraz. In 2014–15, Karpov was clearly a figure of some influence in eastern Ukraine. Known under the alias 'Nikolai Nikolaevich,' he was reputed to have been involved in the distribution of Kremlin funds to the Donetsk and Lugansk governments.[160] According to *Novaya Gazeta*, Karpov's time in the Donbass was connected to an influx of fighters from Russian far-right organisations, including Dmitrii Demushkin's recently banned Slavyanskii Soyuz (Slavic Union, SS).[161]

Karpov's presence in south-east Ukraine attracted media attention in February 2016 during the trial of Nadezhda Savchenko, the Ukrainian pilot who was captured near Lugansk and charged with the murder of Russian journalists and illegally crossing into Russian territory. Savchenko's defence lawyers played a recording of an alleged discussion about her capture between Karpov and Valerii Bolotov, the titular head of the Lugansk People's Republic. Savchenko herself testified that Karpov was the senior official who supervised her extradition to Russia.[162] Denying the accusation, Karpov suggested that it was a case of mistaken identity: in the conflict zone, 'there were rather a lot of fat bearded men in combat fatigues.'[163]

Karpov's work in the separatist territories was assisted by one of his closest colleagues, Leonid Simunin, the former Mestnye leader who had competed with Mitryushin for the role of Russkii Obraz's principal curator. Both in his work for the Presidential Administration and in his business ventures, Simunin appeared to be inseparable from Karpov. In 2009, they had co-founded a company called 'Region-150,' and the following year they became joint owners of

an automobile-repair business.[164] Aleksandr Borodai, the Moscow-based political technologist who served as premier of the Donetsk People's Republic, later recalled that Karpov was an old friend and '[Simunin] was his acquaintance.'[165] In Donetsk, Simunin appeared as a functionary of the newly created Ministry for Energy.[166] According to some accounts, including Boris Nemtsov's report *Putin: War*, Simunin was no less than a 'deputy minister.'[167] In practice, this meant that he was a link in the money trail from Moscow to the separatist states. Quoting an unnamed senior official in the Donetsk administration, the newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported that Russia was bankrolling all the local ministries, and its 'chief treasurer,' entrusted with distributing funds to leading separatists, was Leonid Simunin.[168]

Veterans of Russkii Obraz also contributed to Russia's propaganda war against Ukraine. In 2014–15, Evgenii Valyaev and Stanislav Byshok established themselves as expert commentators from two NGOs that had a long history of collaboration with the Kremlin. The first was CIS-EMO, an 'election-monitoring organisation' that had helped to legitimise fraudulent elections in the post-Soviet space.[169] The second was Narodnaya Diplomatiya (Public Diplomacy), an organisation ostensibly dedicated to the promotion of ethnic harmony in the post-Soviet space. The two organisations, which shared the same office space, were the brainchild of Aleksei Kochetkov, a political technologist who had played a conspicuous role in Russia's efforts to neutralise Western democracy promotion in the former Soviet space. It is easy to understand why Kochetkov favoured graduates of a far-right organisation like Russkii Obraz. As a young adult in early 1990s, Kochetkov had risen to upper echelon of RNE, the neo-Nazi movement headed by Aleksandr Barkashov. There is no doubt that Kochetkov shared the movement's ideology. In 1994, he explained to an interviewer why RNE had chosen the swastika as its symbol: 'For us it is a symbol of uncompromising struggle against the international Jewish financial oligarchy, let us call it that, obscurely.' When prompted by the interviewer to be less obscure, he added: 'Against world Jewry. The basic enemy of our people. An infection or a bacteria.'[170]

For Kochetkov's operation, the Ukrainian war was a bonanza. In 2014, Narodnaya Diplomatiya received a grant of 5,698,020 rubles to monitor 'the activity of nationalist and extremist movements in Russia and CIS countries.' In the same round, CIS-EMO was awarded 4,929,630 rubles for a project on 'nationalist threats to democratic institutions in the post-Soviet space and the cooperation of Russian and Ukrainian NGOs at the interregional level.'[171] This funding made it possible for Kochetkov's team to reinvent themselves as experts on far-right extremism. In April 2014, Byshok and Kochetkov published a volume titled *The Stepan Bandera Euromaidan: From Democracy to Dictatorship*. Exploiting their deep knowledge of the Ukrainian far-right milieu, they portrayed the 'Revolution of Dignity' as the culmination of a history of neo-Nazi and Russophobic tendencies. Assiduously promoted by the Russian media, presented to the Public Chamber and at the OSCE, it became an important tool of Kremlin propaganda.[172] For its authors, it also became a path to respectability.

No less remarkable was the trajectory of Anna Bogacheva, a Russkii Obraz insider who became a symbol of the Kremlin's information war against the West.

Known in far-right circles as 'Anna Trigga,' Bogacheva was close to Goryachev and a key figure in Russkii Obraz's St. Petersburg branch.[173] She contributed to Russkii Obraz's debates about the role of women in the rightist movement and became a leader of the Right Conservative Alliance.[174] By 2014, she was a senior employee of the Internet Research Agency, the St. Petersburg troll factory funded by the oligarch Evgenii Prigozhin. According to the US Justice Department, she worked on the Agency's translator project and headed its data analysis group. In June 2014, she entered the United States under false pretences, and for three weeks travelled to nine states to gather material for the fabrication of fake identities on social media. Alongside 13 employees of the Agency, she was indicted in February 2018 for her involvement in Russian interference operations.[175]

Bitva za Donbass

Veterans of Russkii Obraz led the major public campaign to rally Russian nationalists behind the 'Novorossiya Project,' the effort to forge a viable ethnic Russian state in southeast Ukraine. Bitva za Donbass (Battle for Donbass) was officially headed by Aleksei Zhivov, a prominent member of the Right Conservative Alliance and a participant in Russkii Obraz's subsidiary project, Russkaya Demografiya.[176] Apart from its leadership, the most obvious connection between Bitva za Donbass and Russkii Obraz was the glamorisation of 'partisans.' The new movement's posters and websites featured vivid images of photogenic men and women, each masked, leather-jacketed, and brandishing an automatic weapon.[177]

The first major public venture of Bitva za Donbass was an authorised rally in Moscow's Suvorov Square on 11 June 2014. Timed to coincide with the 40-day mourning period for the victims of the fire in Odessa's House of Trade Union, it was heavily promoted by Ridus, rightist social networks, and sympathetic nationalist bloggers. According to the organisers, several thousand people attended the rally. The stated purpose was the collection of donations for humanitarian supplies and signatures on a petition in support of more aggressive Russian intervention in south-east Ukraine.[178] But there was also a clear nationalist agenda. Aleksei Zhivov claimed that Bitva za Donbass' goal was to halt the West's 'genocide' and to preserve Russia's 'identity' in Novorossiya. In an interview with Ridus, Zhivov presented the conflict in Manichean terms:

> Any sane citizen of Russia, irrespective of his political views, is obliged to share our position. And conversely, anyone who thinks that what is happening now in a neighboring state is its internal affair, whether he calls himself a 'Russian nationalist' or a 'communist-internationalist' or a 'liberal-Westerniser,' he is an enemy not merely of his people, he is an enemy of common sense.[179]

The rally was addressed by two insurgent leaders (Denis Pushilin and Pavel Gubarev), by a array of Kremlin-aligned far-right intellectuals (Aleksandr Dugin, Valerii Korovin, Egor Kholmogorov) and by institutional figures like the LDPR leader, Vladimir Zhirinovskii. The speeches were dominated by the glorification

of the insurgents and calls for Putin to intervene. There was a fine line, however, between putting pressure on the authorities and challenging the regime. On one occasion, part of the crowd began to chant, 'Putin, don't be a traitor!' To silence the troublemakers, the organisers led the crowd in chanting a less contentious exhortation: 'Putin, send troops.'[180]

The tension between Bitva za Donbass's loyalism and the crowd's frustration at the Kremlin's restraint became more pronounced at the movement's second rally on 2 August, which was attended by some 2,000 demonstrators.[181] In his opening address, Aleksei Zhivov hailed the heroism of Igor Girkin ('Strelkov'), the charismatic Defence Minister of the DNR. Demonstrating an expansive notion of Novorossiya, Zhivov called for a victorious war that would end in the liberation of 'Russian Kiev.' When one heckler shouted, 'Strelkov for president!,' Zhivov made it clear that the presidency was taboo. 'We have a supreme commander,' he shouted. 'His name is Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, let him resolve the tasks of the state.' Zhivov underlined his subordination to the Kremlin by echoing official propaganda about a sinister American conspiracy that was intended to prevent Russia's resurgence by inciting conflict with its Ukrainian brothers. 'The war with America has been declared on us!' he shouted, before concluding to a burst of applause: 'Glory to Donbass! Glory to Strelkov!'[182]

Zhivov's introduction set the scene for a succession of incendiary orations by pro-Putin nationalists and Kremlin propagandists. Some exalted the separatist militias. Aleksandr Dugin, the neo-Eurasianist ideologue, shouted that 'Our name is Strelkov! Our name is [field commander Aleksei] Mozgovoi!' Egor Kholmogorov lambasted opponents of military intervention as child-murderers. Others focused their invective on the internal enemy. Evgenii Fedorov, the Duma deputy and leader of the Kremlin-backed NOD (National Liberation Movement), attributed Ukraine's very existence to the intrigues of a 'fifth column… powerful Western-sponsored organisations.' The Eurasianist Yurii Malinovskii demanded the suppression of the radio station Ekho Moskvy and the television station Dozhd'. More menacing was Roman Antonovskii, Zhivov's colleague in the Right-Conservative Alliance, who ended his speech with the catchcry: 'Death to liberals! Death to anarchists.'[183]

Despite its auspicious beginning, Bitva za Donbass was doomed by the Kremlin's decision to abandon the Novorossiya project in the autumn of 2014. The struggle for a viable state was replaced by the defence of the two separatist enclaves. The most visible sign of this shift was the withdrawal of the Russian citizens who had assumed leading roles in the separatist republics. Five days after Bitva za Donbass' second rally, Aleksandr Borodai, the Russian nationalist who served as premier of the DNR, announced his resignation on twitter.[184] He was followed within days by Igor' Girkin ('Strelkov').[185] The departure of these ardent proponents of Novorossiya facilitated the signing of the Minsk Protocol on 5 September by Russia, Ukraine and the leaders of the two statelets. Amongst Russian nationalists, euphoria about the Russian Spring quickly gave way to conspiracy theories about an internal 'fifth column' that had orchestrated the betrayal of Novorossiya. Conditions for advocates of military escalation quickly deteriorated. Aleksandr Dugin, who had recently been dismissed from his post at

Moscow State University, complained that advocates of the two separatist republics were being barred from state television or having their appearances confined to a restricted framework. There was, according to him, nothing less than 'a purge of the supporters of the Russian Spring.'[186]

The Kremlin's volte-face had immediate consequences for Bitva za Donbass. The Moscow mayor's office rejected its application for 5,000 people to attend a third rally at Poklonnaya Gora on 28 September 2014. Zhivov retaliated with a vituperative denunciation of Moscow's deputy mayor, Nikolai Gorbenko, who had 'consciously sabotaged' the event and was supporting the genocidal project of the 'Kiev Nazis.'[187] Zhivov's fulminations elicited some derision. Questioning how many humanitarian convoys had been dispatched by Bitva za Donbass, the political technologist Aleksei Chesnakov accused the group of exploiting the events in southeast Ukraine for its own PR.[188] There was little evidence, however, that Zhivov's PR efforts were building up a mass following. The numbers at Bitva za Donbass' third formal rally, held on 18 October, had dwindled to the hundreds.[189]

The impact of official obstructionism on Bitva za Donbass was aggravated by the trial of four members of BORN: Maksim Baklagin, Mikhail Volkov, Vyacheslav Isaev and Yurii Tikhomirov. The proceedings, which began in November 2014, shone a spotlight on the dark past of the movement's leaders. Both Nikita Tikhonov and Evgeniya Khasis testified in court about the interconnection between managed nationalism and BORN's terror campaign. Tikhonov traced BORN's origins to Goryachev's proposal to create a paramilitary group to terrorise the enemies of his new friends in the Presidential Administration.[190] The point was amplified by Khasis, who implied that Vladislav Surkov, using Simunin as his intermediary, was the ultimate curator of BORN: 'it was [Surkov and Simunin] who will be mixed up in the future crimes.'[191]

The waning of the Novorossiya lobby was underlined by the vain efforts of the defendants to pose as champions of the separatist cause. Maksim Baklagin actually petitioned the FSB to send him to fight in Ukraine in a *shtrafbat*, a punitive batallion sent to the frontlines by Stalin during World War Two. For the prosecutor, however, Baklagin's offer was further evidence of his criminality: 'Look, he still wants to go to war to kill.'[192] No more successful were the efforts of Il'ya Goryachev to reinvent himself as a prophet of Novorossiya. In a series of articles written from his prison cell for Ekho Moskvy and Modus Agendi during 2014, Goryachev glorified the insurgents, likened their struggle to Bosnian Serb nationalists, and highlighted his own connection to their cause.[193] This patriotic posturing had no effect on the inexorable progress of the case against him.

In an effort to reaffirm their trustworthiness, the leaders of Bitva za Donbass joined a new loyalist initiative, the Antimaidan movement. Uniting an array of anti-Western organisations, Antimaidan was far more menacing than the crowds of provincial students mobilised by Nashi and pro-Kremlin youth movements during the original 'preventive counter-revolution.' Antimaidan's founding procession on 23 February 2015, the first anniversary of the toppling of Yanukovych, attracted some 35,000 marchers. A large contingent – members of Boevoe Bratstvo, the Union of ex-Paratroopers, Officers of Russia, and the Council of Afghan

Veterans – had a military background. No less belligerent were assorted paramilitaries from Ukraine, militants from new pro-Kremlin structures like NOD, bikers from Aleksandr Zaldostanov's Nightwolves, Cossacks, martial arts fighters, and Kadyrovite militants from Chechnya. Bitva za Donbass claimed that its own column was 1,000 strong.[194] There is little doubt that it helped to draw some Russian nationalists into this counter-revolutionary show of force.

Despite its demonstrative loyalty to the regime, Bitva za Donbass derived few benefits from enlistment in Antimaidan. Growing pressure from the security organs derailed Zhivov's plans for a new rally, which was intended to mark the first anniversary of the conflagration at Odessa's House of Trade Unions that had resulted in the deaths of some 46 ethnic Russians.[195] On 5 May 2015, police raided the flats of both Zhivov and Evgenii Valyaev, the two leaders of Bitva za Donbass.[196] According to Zhivov, officers smashed down his front door and handcuffed him. When he refused to disclose his email password, he was beaten. In response to his plea that he was from 'Novorossiya,' the police told him that 'for that we will kick you even harder in the kidneys.'[197] Not without reason did Zhivov complain that this brutality was linked to his public activity and to his support for Crimea and Donbass.[198] In fact, it may have been connected to the Goryachev trial, which opened ten days later. What was clear was that support for Novorossiya was no guarantee against repression.

The Goryachev trial

Unlike the prosecution of Tikhonov, Goryachev's trial did not become a cause célèbre for Russian nationalists. There were no demonstrations outside the courtroom nor was there a crowd of sympathisers inside it. Goryachev's mother, the poet Nataliya Nikiforova, cut a lonely figure in the public gallery, which was dominated by families of BORN's victims, journalists, and the occasional celebrity visitor like Pussy Riot's Nadezhda Tolokonnikova. The case was shunned by nationalist rights-defenders, who had long since ostracised Goryachev as a turncoat and pariah. Neither the guilty verdict nor the life sentence handed out by Judge Pavel Melekhin on 24 July 2015 elicited more than a murmur of protest.

The trial did, however, shine a brief spotlight on the dark recesses of 'managed nationalism.' Goryachev's lawyers seized every opportunity to emphasise his links to the Kremlin. They even attempted to summon Nikita Ivanov and Maksim Mishchenko as witnesses. Although the judge rejected these demands, the proceedings provided incontrovertible evidence of the collaboration between Kremlin functionaries and Russkii Obraz. By divulging a mass of electronic data obtained from Goryachev's laptop and mobile phone, the prosecution laid bare the inner workings of managed nationalism. Goryachev's dealings with Kremlin functionaries like Pavel Karpov and his friendly banter with curators like Aleksei Mitryushin and Leonid Simunin, all became part of the trial materials. Particularly illuminating were Goryachev's messages to Tikhonov about his impending visit to Nikita Ivanov to present 'the complete scenario' for the Bolotnaya Square concert.[199] Discussions between Goryachev and the inner circle of Russkii Obraz also revealed how they had consciously exploited the nihilism of the regime, its

indifference to their neo-Nazi convictions.[200] The depth of Goryachev's connections to the authorities was confirmed by defence witnesses, including former members of Russkii Obraz. Aleksei Mikhailov recalled how he had accompanied Goryachev and Leonid Simunin to a meeting with Pavel Karpov, the official of the Presidential Administration responsible for supervising the far-right.[201] Stanislav Byshok claimed that there was a 'constant interaction' between Goryachev and the authorities about how to counter the opposition. This interaction transformed Goryachev into a consummate insider, who was privy to information about internal Kremlin politics.[202]

Photograph 6 Goryachev on trial (credit: Evgeny Feldman, Moscow-based independent freelance photographer)

The connection between Russkii Obraz and the Kremlin was underlined by Goryachev's effort to position himself as precursor of the Kremlin's embrace of ethnonationalism. At every opportunity, Goryachev identified himself with the 'separatist' struggle in southeast Ukraine. He appeared in court wearing a 'Krym nash' ('Crimea Is Ours') t-shirt. In his final statement to the jury, he boasted: 'If some of you consider me guilty of the creation of Russkii Obraz, which six to seven years ago said what is being voiced broadcast by every television station, such an accusation will be an honour for me.'[203]

The volume of information about 'managed nationalism' transformed the trial into a political event. Even Putin's press-spokesman, Dmitrii Peskov, was forced to issue a denial that the trial had anything to do with the Presidential Administration.[204] Many observers were unconvinced. The journalist Aleksandr Litoi drew attention to the fact that the case files contained documents that had little value as prosecution evidence but exposed the cooperation between neo-Nazis, the Presidential Administration, and the Interior Ministry. 'Now, though,' reflected Litoi, 'these documents are in the open. Why?'[205]

The most obvious target of the revelations was Vladislav Surkov, the architect of 'managed nationalism,' whose resignation from the government had coincided with Goryachev's arrest. In the months that followed, the BORN case developed in tandem with an investigation of corruption at the innovation centre at Skolkovo. This second case, which began with the arrest of Skolkovo's deputy director over a payment to opposition politician Il'ya Ponomarev, potentially implicated Surkov as a supporter of the Bolotnaya protests.[206] The result was a public clash between Surkov and a spokesman of the Investigative Committee.[207] What appears to have put an end to this simmering conflict was Surkov's return to the Kremlin as a presidential adviser in September 2013.[208]

The Goryachev case had unpleasant repercussions for some of Russkii Obraz's sympathisers. Particularly incriminating was the exposure of Russkii Obraz's links to German Sterligov, the nationalist businessman who had hosted its military patriotic camp at his estate in the summer of 2009. On 6 July, a spokesman for Sterligov announced that he had left Russia for Nagorno-Karabakh. Soon afterwards, the prominent lawyer Aleksei Sklyarenko told a radio station that Sterligov faced up to 15 years in prison for membership of BORN and up to three years for financing an extremist organisation.[209] In fact, Sterligov's fears were unfounded. In late August, a month after Goryachev's conviction, Sterligov returned to Russia. Although he was interrogated for five hours at Moscow's Domodedovo airport, he was not prosecuted for his dealings with Russkii Obraz.[210]

Another sign of the impact of the trial was the demise of Modus Agendi, the website and discussion club that constituted the main successor structure to Russkii Obraz. By the autumn of 2015, its web address automatically redirected to a site headlined 'Freedom to Il'ya Goryachev,' who was described as a 'political prisoner and right-conservative politician.'[211]

Despite the loss of this platform, a cohort of Russkii Obraz graduates flourished in the increasingly authoritarian system that emerged in the aftermath of the invasion of Ukraine. Andrei Gulyutin was promoted to the editorship of Ridus, which remained a bulwark of pro-Kremlin nationalism.[212] Under the aegis of CIS-EMO and Narodnaya Diplomatiya, Stanislav Byshok and Evgenii Valyaev continued to produce analytical reports about the Kremlin's adversaries. Even during the Goryachev trial, at which both testified, they appeared at the press-centre of Russia Today to launch a new study of the influence of the Euromaidan on extremism in Russia.[213] Also untouched was Dmitrii Steshin, the *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* journalist, who was closely linked to both Nikita Tikhonov (who hid in his apartment) and Il'ya Goryachev (who was the godfather of his son). While his friends served their life sentences, Steshin consolidated his position as the most celebrated propagandist of the Russian military establishment. For his coverage of the intervention in Syria, he was awarded a medal by Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu for 'high professionalism and objectivity in covering the military operation.'[214]

Less successful were Russkii Obraz's Kremlin interlocutors, whose careers were tarnished by their ties to Goryachev. None fell from grace more spectacularly than Maksim Mishchenko, the pro-Kremlin youth leader whose meteoric

career had included terms in the State Duma and the Public Chamber. In 2014, as the Goryachev case was unfolding, Mishchenko left Moscow for Tula, where took a position as a deputy minister in the regional administration. He was soon arrested on corruption charges instigated by activists of a local humanitarian NGO. His reputation tarnished by the ongoing revelations about his collaboration with neo-Nazis, Mishchenko could no longer count on Kremlin support to protect him from the law-enforcement agencies. In 2017, he was sentenced to two and a half years of imprisonment.[215]

Other interlocutors between the Kremlin and Russkii Obraz may have avoided jail, but they never reclaimed their positions of influence. Aleksei Mitryushin, who served for several years as a councillor in a small town in Moscow region, found employment as the head of a sports club linked to his old football gang.[216] Leonid Simunin, who had served as 'Minister for Energy' in the DNR while the BORN trial was in preparation, was appointed an adviser to the governor of Kaliningrad in April 2018. The ensuing uproar provoked his dismissal eight hours later and a public apology from the governor.[217]

Nikita Ivanov, the Kremlin's main supervisor of 'managed nationalism,' also struggled to find a place in the post-2012 system. For several years, Ivanov served as Dagestan's representative in the Federation Council. His dismissal was announced in the summer of 2013, shortly after Surkov's resignation as vice-premier.[218] Despite rumours that Ivanov might return to the Kremlin after Surkov's appointment as a presidential adviser in September 2013, Ivanov was left out in the cold. According to a well-informed commentator cited by *Kommersant"*, the chances of Ivanov's return were low because of his 'peculiar reputation.'[219] That 'peculiar reputation' became even more sinister after the revelations of the BORN and Goryachev trials. By 2017, Ivanov's only claim to fame was his involvement in the production of a scandalous music video that warned young people against joining anti-Kremlin demonstrations.[220]

Conclusion

The Kremlin's 'second preventive counter-revolution' transformed the relationship between the Putin regime and Russian nationalism. On the one hand, the state became far more responsive to Russian nationalist grievances, ideas and causes. During Putin's third term, the Kremlin promoted a conception of the Russian nation that revolved around traditional values and the protection of the sensitivities of Russian Orthodox believers. It unleashed a protracted campaign against illegal immigration. In Crimea and southeast Ukraine, it realised long-standing irredentist demands.

The impact of this appropriation of the nationalist programme was magnified by the sustained crackdown on nationalists who had joined the protest movement. The victims of this crackdown ranged from militants like Aleksandr Belov and Dmitrii Demushkin to major platforms of Russian nationalism like DPNI, Russkie and Slavyanskii Soyuz. Deprived of its unique demands, its leadership decimated, its public presence curtailed, Russian nationalism ceased to be an autonomous force in political life. Its major events, such as the annual Russian

march, no longer attracted formidable crowds. By the time that Goryachev departed Moscow to serve his life sentence in a labour camp near the Arctic circle, it appeared that Russian nationalism was no longer a threat that needed to be managed.

What was obscured by the crushing of anti-Putin nationalism was the surreptitious progress of radical nationalists in Kremlin-aligned structures, in the media, and in civil society. For many of these militants, the second preventive counter-revolution offered an opportunity to join the Putin regime's onslaught against the white-ribbon protest movement. Even veterans of Russkii Obraz, despite the shocking revelations of the BORN trials, were carried to new heights by the loyalist, 'right conservative' wave. In the process, they acquired access to resources, an opening to public space, and a path to respectability. They also won an opportunity to continue what Goryachev had called 'a struggle… for a future regime within the limits of a single generation.'

Notes

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Conclusion

The history of Russkii Obraz offers important lessons about the relationship of the Putin regime to Russian nationalism. Contrary to scholars who have portrayed the regime as a bulwark against fascism, an opponent of xenophobia, and a promoter of 'normal' nationalism, this history suggests that the Kremlin's 'managed nationalism' aided violent neo-Nazis to the detriment of more moderate forces. This preference was a logical consequence of the regime's evolution. Neo-Nazis, with their hostility to liberal democracy, were more suited to the needs of a regime that was dismantling democratic institutions and constructing an authoritarian system. While mainstream nationalists were increasingly drawn to the anti-Putin opposition and its demands for free elections, the leaders of Russkii Obraz welcomed the opportunity to work with an autocratising regime. By becoming integrated into managed nationalism, they gained access to public space, to resources, and to connections in state institutions. They also acquired a competitive advantage in the struggle against their liberal and antifa adversaries. In the process, they helped the Kremlin to subjugate the political arena and to rally nationalists behind the regime. As this book has shown, militants from Russkii Obraz contributed to four major struggles that became landmarks in the consolidation of authoritarianism in Russia: the 'preventive counter-revolution' of 2005–7; the disruption of the emerging alliance of radical nationalists and national liberals in 2008; the mobilisation of anti-Western radicals behind the Kremlin during the conservative turn of 2012–13; and the assault on post-revolutionary Ukraine in 2014. In each of these upheavals, far-right radicals cooperated with Kremlin curators to advance the regime's goals – and their own.

There is no doubt that 'managed nationalism' offered significant benefits to the Putin regime. The very presence of nationalists in pro-Kremlin youth organisations and United Russia's Russkii Proekt lent authenticity to the regime's patriotic posturing. No less important was the contribution of Kremlin-backed nationalists to the struggle against the 'Orangist' opposition. Some of them helped to fabricate propaganda that stigmatised the Kremlin's opponents as pawns of foreign interests. Others enlisted militants from far-right subcultures to fortify loyalist crowds. 'We constantly heard from [Pavel] Karpov,' recalled Goryachev, "more people are needed, bring out more nationalists".'[1] And others served as intermediaries with violent gangs that could be used as proxies in the campaign of intimidation that the regime was waging against its adversaries in the streets.

Despite these dividends, managed nationalism was a dangerous gamble. Many of the Kremlin's nationalist proxies were simply unmanageable. Their conduct was shaped by the dictates of their ideologies and the expectations of their subcultures, not by the incentives offered by Kremlin curators. Collaboration was opportunistic, a means to advance a cause and promote a set of ideas. When Russkii Obraz organised an authorised Russian March in November 2008, its detractors accused it of playing 'a game according to the rules of regime.' It responded with a candid admission: 'No, it is a game according to the rules that are possible today. And in order to change them tomorrow, we must show unity and faith in victory.'[2] Working with the regime was strategy for destroying the system. This duplicity was unexceptional. Russkii Obraz was only the most glaring example of a succession of Kremlin-backed nationalist projects that had become double-edged swords. The most prominent was Rodina, the political party that claimed to be the 'president's *spetsnaz*' until it unfurled the banners of a 'coloured,' anti-corruption revolution. No less problematic was Aleksandr Dugin's Eurasian Youth Union, which proved incapable of controlling the crowds of skinheads it had mobilised for the anti-Orangist rally that became the inaugural 'Russian March.'

What distinguished Russkii Obraz from the Putin regime's earlier nationalist collaborators was its extreme radicalism. From the outset, Russkii Obraz exemplified Roger Griffin's definition of fascism as revolutionary palingenetic ultranationalism. The earliest issues of *Russkii Obraz* journal left no doubt about its editors' preoccupations with race, degeneration, and terrorist violence. As Russkii Obraz grew into a public movement and an ally of the Kremlin, these preoccupations found expression in numerous statements and actions. The documentary film *Russkoe Soprotivlenie*, which glorified neo-Nazi killers and provided a platform for the advocates of anti-state terrorism, speaks for itself. No less inflammatory was Russkii Obraz's official programme, which affirmed human inequality and promised to introduce an apartheid-style state. The apotheosis of this radicalism was the authorised performance by Kolovrat, a band from the outer limits of Russian neo-Nazism, in Bolotnaya Square on the day of the annual Russian March on 4 November 2009.

The embarrassment caused by the Kremlin's approval of this spectacle was magnified by the arrest of Tikhonov and the investigation of the BORN case. By the time of Goryachev's trial in 2015, it was clear that BORN's campaign of terror was bound up with managed nationalism. The hunt for targets was facilitated by information about Antifa militants that Goryachev had acquired from security structures as part of a Kremlin-funded project on the leftist opposition. Although there is no evidence that the supervisors of managed nationalism were aware of Goryachev's involvement in BORN, their links to him raised many awkward questions. The case became both a major scandal and a source of friction between the Kremlin and the law-enforcement structures that tracked down Tikhonov and his accomplices.

This fiasco was both predictable and preventable. The Kremlin supervisors of managed nationalism were clearly aware of Russkii Obraz's radicalism. As Goryachev wrote in October 2008, 'Our contacts with officialdom take place

without mimicry – they know that we are Nazis and this suits them.'[3] The authorities might be excused for missing Goryachev's coded signals to the neo-Nazi underground in his speech in Pushkin Square in August 2008 at Russkii Obraz's first public action alongside pro-Kremlin youth organisations. By the spring of 2009, however, Russkii Obraz's Day of Solidarity with Rightist Political Prisoners was an emphatic public statement of support for the neo-Nazi underground. Any lingering doubts should have been dispelled by the release of *Russkoe Soprotivlenie*, which Goryachev himself feared would provoke a crackdown.

There are three factors that can help to explain the readiness of Kremlin functionaries to embrace an organisation as dangerous as Russkii Obraz. The first is the interaction between *sistema*, the system of governance practices based on informal networks, and groupuscular far-right subcultures. *Sistema* meant that major decisions were made by 'go-ahead' signals to curators, project managers who operated through personal agents to accomplish goals. What made this procedure problematic in the management of nationalism was the fact that curators and their agents came from far-right subcultures. As Goryachev boasted in a 2008 email, 'we are communicating with subcultural people' in the regime, ex-militants like the Dugin protégé Pavel Karpov and the football gang leader Aleksei Mitryushin.[4] As curators operating according to the rules of *sistema*, these 'subcultural people' enjoyed wide room for manoeuvre and many opportunities to promote their acquaintances. They also had a vested interest in the success of their personal network, which was crucial for their future employment by the regime. This circumstance made curators less likely to report signs of danger. Alarm bells did not ring because of the strength of the ties that bound curators to their far-right clients.

The second factor that secured official approval of Russkii Obraz was the transformation of Russian politics into a kind of puppet theatre. This was the work of political technologists, consultants who did not merely manipulate politics but created the political landscape, inventing both loyalist and opposition parties and movements.[5] Russkii Obraz appeared at a time when the Kremlin's political technologists were fabricating political projects, left, right, and centre. There were the social democrats of Spravedlivaya Rossiya, the liberals of Prokhorov's Pravoe Delo, and the national-communists of Gennadii Semigin's Patrioty. Even Antifa leaders were sounded out about the possibility of collaboration with the regime's proxies. This frenetic activity resulted in a proliferation of political projects that served the Kremlin's interests by crowding out opposition forces. To achieve their goals, all these marionettes were required to produce rhetoric and stage public actions to demonstrate their authenticity. In this context, Russkii Obraz's racist and neo-Nazi fulminations could be perceived as a performance, a simulacrum, conceived by cunning political technologists to manipulate a target audience. When everyone is wearing a mask, it becomes difficult to distinguish those who are pretending and those who are deadly serious.

The final factor that is crucial for understanding the collaboration of the Kremlin and Russkii Obraz is ideological convergence. Both the Kremlin and Russian neo-Nazis were engaged in a kind of counter-revolutionary project. The Kremlin's counter-revolution was directed against 'Orangist' pro-democracy

activists; Russkii's Obraz's was directed against liberalism, against the idea of human equality, and against individualism. Despite their differences, these counter-revolutionary projects helped to unite the Kremlin and its neo-Nazi auxiliaries against a common enemy, the liberals and leftists who aspired to make an anti-authoritarian revolution in Russia.

In late 2008, Dmitrii Taratorin had good reasons to believe that Russkii Obraz might become 'the last bastion of responsible NS [national socialism].' What made this protean organisation – gang, propaganda agency, and political party – particularly menacing was its two-track model, based on Sinn Fein and the IRA, of an official, public movement and a terrorist organisation. The public movement, headed by Goryachev, benefitted from connections in the Presidential Administration, which offered financial support, privileged access to public space, and a kind of impunity. At the same time, the terrorist wing, headed by Tikhonov, was devastating the ranks of Russkii Obraz's Antifa adversaries. The effects of this killing campaign should not be underestimated. In particular, the loss of Stanislav Markelov deprived the Russian left of unique figure, both a charismatic leader and a moral authority. For close friends like the historian Yaroslav Leont'ev, it was self-evident that Markelov was destined to play a leading role in the protest movement of 2011–12.[6] The impact of his death was compounded by the killing of Ivan Khutorskoi, Fedor Filatov, and Ivan Dzhaparidze, all effective grassroots militants.

Russkii Obraz's failure to become an enduring presence in Russia's political landscape was the result both of its own recklessness and the tenacity of its adversaries. The murder of Markelov and Baburova in central Moscow produced enough public outrage to force President Medvedev to speak out against neo-Nazi violence and to exhort the security forces to bring the perpetrators to justice. This signal empowered the Investigative Committee's Igor' Krasnov to track down Tikhonov and to construct the case against Goryachev. No less important was the contribution of Antifa activists, whose actions like the annual march on 19 January and the raids on the offices of RuMol relentlessly drew attention to the nexus between the Putin regime and neo-Nazis. The spotlight provided by this agitation was magnified by journalists like Aleksandr Litoi, Dmitrii Okrest, Sergei Sokolov, and Nadezhda Prusenkova in *Novaya Gazeta* and other liberal publications. The efforts of these courageous individuals are a reminder of the important role that civil society and activist networks play under authoritarian conditions.

The legacy of the Kremlin's cooperation with Russkii Obraz was one of suffering and destruction. At each of the three trials connected to BORN, the crowd of distraught relatives in the courtroom reminded the defendants of the human cost of their crimes. Each of the victims of BORN was mourned by families and loved ones. Nadezhda Prusenkova, who covered the BORN trial for *Novaya Gazeta*, observed that the mothers of Judge Eduard Chuvashov and Il'ya Dzhaparidze, and the sister of Ivan Khutorskoi, 'had only one question for the defendants: Why? Why had they done this? They heard no answer.'[7] They also deserved an answer from the supervisors of 'managed nationalism.'

There is little evidence that the Putin regime learned the lessons of its flirtation with the neo-Nazis of Russkii Obraz. The path of 'managed nationalism' is littered with the wreckage of discarded projects, but Kremlin curators continued to cultivate nationalist proxies that were prepared to make common cause with the regime. Some, like Aleksei Zhuravlev's Rodina, Nikolai Starikov's Partiya Velikoe Otechestvo, and Konstantin Malofeev's Tsargrad television station, served as platforms for pro-Kremlin nationalists and anti-Western radicals in public discussion. Others specialised in the intimidation of civil society activists and opposition politicians. The Memorial Society, Russia's most important human rights NGO, faced a relentless campaign of harassment by the National Liberation Movement (NOD), whose thugs had no qualms about throwing eggs at children attending Memorial's prize-giving ceremony for school essay contest winners in 2016.[8] More aggressive were the militants of SERB, a loyalist organisation with roots in southeast Ukraine, who became notorious for spraying green cleaning fluid into the faces of opposition activists and liberal intellectuals. To disperse protest demonstrations, the authorities sometimes resorted to self-styled Cossack groups, who in May 2018 used whips to terrorise demonstrators who answered Aleksei Naval'nyi's call to express their opposition to Putin's inauguration for a fourth presidential term.[9]

Like the neo-Nazis of Russkii Obraz, these militants were natural adversaries of Russia's liberal and leftist opposition. It would be wrong, however, to assume that their loyalty to the Kremlin is more durable. All of them had divergent, potentially subversive agendas. All of them inflamed resentments and practised forms of aggression that could be easily be redirected against a regime whose patriotic propaganda was rarely matched by deeds. For all its concessions to nationalist and xenophobic prejudices, the ruling elite was profoundly cosmopolitan in its conduct and its aspirations. No one demonstrated this more convincingly than Aleksei Naval'nyi, who has repeatedly exposed the extravagant 'offshore' lives of the regime's patriotic functionaries, propagandists, and magnates: the mansions in London, the yachts in the Mediterranean, the parties in Courchevel, the children attending British private schools. This circumstance lies at the core of the unmanageability of 'managed nationalism.' Having sown the winds with intolerance, aggressive xenophobia, and paranoid anti-Westernism, Vladimir Putin may yet reap the whirlwind.

Notes

1 Il'ya Goryachev, *Vivere militare est* (May 2013), p.18.
2 'Russkii Marsh 2008. 4 noyabrya, Naberezhnaya Tarasa Shevchenko,' http://rus-obraz.net/activity/26 (accessed 20 December 2012).
3 Ibragim Zul'fikarpashich (Il'ya Goryachev) to Shinji Toguchi, 17 October 2008, Goryachev Trial Materials Volume 32, 20150115_164705.jpg.
4 Goryachev Trial materials (20150115_164705.jpg).
5 Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine's Orange Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2005), p.86.
6 Kirill Medvedev, 'Zhivoi front Stanislava Markelova,' *Open Democracy*, 19 January 2019, https://www.opendemocracy.net/ru/zhivoy-front-stanislava-markelova/ (accessed 18 December 2019).

7 Nadezhda Prusenkova, 'Sniskhoditel'no vinovny,' *Novaya gazeta*, 3 April 2015, pp.10–11.
8 '"Patrioticheskie" aktivisty zakidali yaitsami detei, uchastvovshikh v istoricheskom konkurse,' *Meduza*, 28 April 2016, https://meduza.io/feature/2016/04/28/pochuvstvovat-epohu-na-sebe (accessed 13 January 2020).
9 Il'ya Yashin, 'Den'gi chto li devat' nekuda?' *Echo Moskvy*, 7 May 2018, https://echo.msk.ru/blog/yashin/2197970-echo/#.WvA6Yuh5H2k.twitter (accessed 16 May 2020).

Source

Goryachev Trial Materials

The most important primary source for this book is the 57 volumes of prosecution materials for the Goryachev trial, which were photographed and posted on the internet by his lawyers after his conviction (https://web.archive.org/web/20150810005109/http://advokat-feygin.ru/index.php?id=7). I downloaded this entire, 30 gigabyte cache, which is no longer available online. Because the pagination is often unclear or missing, I have referenced pages by the volume and the file name.

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